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Sharks loom as Big Willie's final
hope for 2016 swansong

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LAST STOP, CRONULLA

Sharks loom as Big Willie's best hope for a 2016 swansong **BY TONY ADAMS**

HE'S BEEN TO BELMORE, Bondi, Hull, Townsville, Toulon, Newy and Brookie. Now the final destination of Willie Mason's career could be Cronulla.

RLW has learned the Sharks are shaping as Big Willie's last hope of extending his career for one more season.

Told by Manly he's not required next year, the 35-year-old Mason is desperate to play one last season.

Most clubs have salary-cap issues and are baulking at signing the veteran forward, with Cronulla one of the few sides considering whether to throw him a lifeline for the 2016 season.

But the Sharks' cap is close to full and the clock is ticking, with each passing week lessening the chance of Mason landing a contract.

"We're still hopeful of something happening in the NRL and there has been some interest out there from a couple of clubs," Mason's manager Sam Ayoub says. "Willie has shown enough this year to justify going around again and he's in good shape and super keen for one last season. It's just a question of coming up with the right fit."

Mason, who made the first of his 291 NRL appearances for the Bulldogs in round 13, 2000, has given Manly good value this season. But the 2004 premiership winner is another victim of Bob Fulton's massive cleanout of the club for incoming coach Trent Barrett.

Even current Sea Eagles assistant coach David Penna believes Mason is worth another season at what would be his sixth NRL club.

"Geoff (Toovey) and I met with him at the start of the year and knew he would be good around the place," Penna says.

"Willie is a big personality both on and off the field and every time he comes to training he brings energy and enthusiasm. You'd think he was 20 years old. He's been really good for the young players around the place and really good for us coaches.

"He is playing some of his best football... he still has another year in him."

Should he fail to land a club for a 16th NRL season, Mason is already planning for life after football. He has a number of business interests on the go and is also carving out a good reputation as a talking head on Fox Sports.

The fate of another veteran forward could decide whether Mason gets a start at the Sharks.

Former Tigers star Chris Heighington – aged 33, two years younger than Mason – is negotiating a new Cronulla contract, but there's also interest in him from England.

If Heighington strikes a deal with the Sharks, Mason's chances of getting a start will plummet.

Interestingly, the coach who blooded Heighington into first grade way back in 2003 is the man trying to lure him overseas. Ex-Tigers boss Tim Sheens was appointed football director at Salford two months ago, and is chasing NRL players such as Heighington to bolster the squad.

The 2005 premiership-winning forward played four Tests for the Poms in 2011 and has a British passport through his father, making him a valuable commodity to English clubs as he wouldn't be classed as an overseas import. **RLW**

Replacing Bellyache might not be a massive headache!



If Craig Bellamy decides next year is his last in charge of Melbourne, his replacement could be right under the Storm's nose

BY TONY ADAMS & JOEL GOULD

AN UNKNOWN FROM THE sleepy NSW seaside town of Batemans Bay is shaping as a shock lead contender to fill the massive boots of Craig Bellamy at the Storm in 2017.

Assistant coach Adam O'Brien has won the admiration of people in high places at the Storm and may well get the nod over a big-name coach.

Bellamy has indicated that 2016 could be his final year and is set to consider his future when the current season concludes. But there's a two-year option in Bellamy's favour that he can activate if he so desires, which would keep him at the helm until 2018.

Rabbitohs coach and former Bellamy assistant Michael Maguire, Roosters mentor Trent Robinson and Bulldogs coach Des Hasler are

all off contract at the end of 2017 as well.

If Bellamy does pull the pin next year, the Storm will need to decide whether they want to chase an elite premiership-winning coach or elevate someone already in their system.

O'Brien joined the Storm in 2007 and worked with current stars Jesse Bromwich, Matt Duffie and Mahe Fonua in his roles as Under-20s assistant and development coach. He came on board as Bellamy's assistant in 2014 and is highly regarded.

Former Storm star Scott Hill believes Melbourne must go with a coach, or former player, who understands the club's systems and culture.

"Michael Maguire is a good example of someone who came through that system and knew what worked," Hill says.

"Craig gave Michael the opportunity to handle the team during the periods he coached NSW, and he handled that well.

"The club is built on a certain culture, systems and standards and to bring someone in externally who hasn't lived it would be very difficult.

"I believe it would bring Melbourne undone if they brought

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Cameron Smith (top right) has no intention of replacing Craig Bellamy (top left) when he leaves the Storm; but assistant coach Adam O'Brien (inset) has emerged as a top contender for the position.

someone in who doesn't stick to the principles that have made the club what it is.

"That's when it could all unravel.

"There are also good people like (assistant Tigers coach) David Kidwell and he knows the system that works."

Hill believes Bellamy's presence is essential beyond next year as the club prepares for life after Cameron Smith, Billy Slater and Cooper Cronk.

"I think personally that they need Craig there when they lose the Big Three to get them through that period," Hill says.

"It's probably the worst time for him to leave.

"Craig has been the centre of influence for the last 10 years and the driver of the culture, the behaviour and the improvement in players.

"Melbourne will need to find a person who can work at his level, with his commitment, work ethic and passion.

"It's a gap that you can't fill effectively."

Smith was voted by his peers in the *RLW* Players' Poll this year as the man most likely to become an outstanding NRL coach.

But Smith has told Bellamy he has no interest in the position. *RLW*

RUSSELL'S RED V REVIVAL

FORMER BAD BOY RUSSELL

Packer has stunned the Dragons with his fitness levels since being allowed to train with the NRL squad earlier this month.

Packer has been banned from playing in the top grade this season in the wake of his 12-month jail sentence last year for his involvement in an alcohol-fuelled brawl in Sydney in which he stomped on a man's head.

The former Warriors prop has been playing with the Dragons' NSW Cup feeder team, the Illawarra Cutters, but is set to return to the NRL in great shape next year.

"He's the fittest he has ever been and looks terrific," Dragons recruitment manager Peter Mulholland says of the 25-year-old former Kiwi Test prop.

"He's 120 kilos but carrying it really well and is playing 80 minutes most weeks in the NSW Cup, which is a fair effort.

"Now he's back training with the NRL team, it has really helped him and his fitness levels are very impressive.

"He should be a big asset to us next year."

After a great start to the season, the Dragons hit the wall mid-year and were being out-muscled by rival packs.

But the addition of the giant Packer will add bulk and go-forward to the Red V up the middle next season.

Packer is still undergoing education and welfare programs and club officials are satisfied he has learned the error of his ways.

He has also been working as a community development officer at the club.

TONY ADAMS



'My jaw is still causing problems'

Anthony Tupou is back on the field, but the side effects of his gruesome injury remain . . . and could be permanent

BY TONY ADAMS

ANTHONY TUPOU HAS made the shock revelation that he has possibly suffered permanent damage to his face from that dreadful incident involving Warriors centre Konrad Hurrell.

Tupou missed 12 weeks and Hurrell copped a three-week suspension for the ugly incident at Remondis Stadium in round nine. A wayward knee from Hurrell collected Tupou, shattering his jaw and causing him to lose several teeth. At the time, doctors described the injury as one of the worst broken jaws they had seen, with fears Tupou's season was over.

The veteran all-rounder returned to action three weeks ago but is still wearing the scars – both mentally and physically.

"It was a bad one – there was blood everywhere, teeth everywhere," Tupou recalls.

"The pain was horrific and I was in a bit of shock I think.

"One doctor said my mouth looked like a 'dropped pie'."

Tupou needed four plates and six screws to rebuild his jaw . . . and then doctors dropped a bombshell last week.

"It has been pretty painful and numb but I thought that would pass in time," the former Test forward says.

"So I went back to the specialist and he said the numbness I'm feeling may be permanent – there's a chance I won't get the full feeling back.

"He said it's too early to tell . . . hopefully it improves because it's still causing me problems."

Tupou and Hurrell have made their peace since the incident. And Tupou can see a humorous side to the drama now.

"If I'm eating and leave some food on the left side of my chin, I can't feel it," he says. "So I have to rely on one of the boys to tell me and wipe it off."

Tupou admits he had a crisis of confidence before returning from the dreadful injury last month.

"I tried not to think about it . . . I was worried," he says.

"But we had a full-on scrimmage a few days before my first game back and I got through that OK, and that helped ease my worries.

"It was a long time out of the game and a long time to think about it, but I'm getting my fitness and confidence back and playing more minutes every week."

Tupou had a big reason to get back on the paddock – he's 31 and off contract.

"I needed to show people that I could get over this and play good footy again," he says.

"Sitting there with a broken jaw, your mind wanders and I was concerned it could be the end if I didn't get back before the season was finished.

"My manager is talking to the Sharks at the moment and I also have some interest from England.

"But given the choice, I'd like to stay and finish my career here.

"Hopefully it will be sorted soon." RLW



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Read more fresh scoops from The Mole

PAGE 32

Get all the weekend results from lower grades
and country footy

PAGE 39

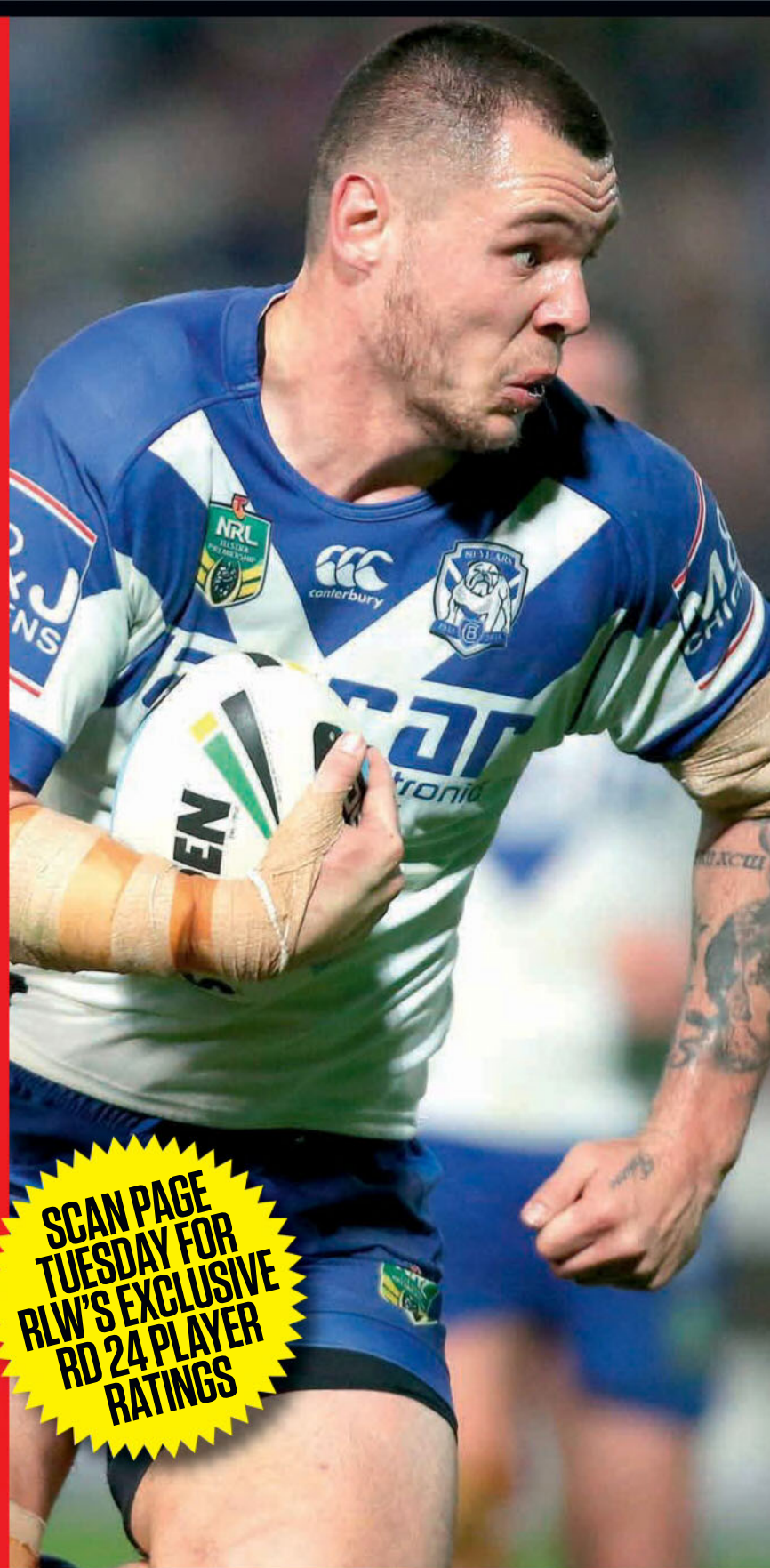
Watch video highlights of the 1972 grand final
between Manly and the Roosters

PAGE 41

See the round 25 teams as they're named

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SCAN PAGE
TUESDAY FOR
RLW'S EXCLUSIVE
RD 24 PLAYER
RATINGS

THIS WEEK ON RUGBYLEAGUEWEEK.COM.AU

MONDAY

THE WEEKEND WRAP

Catch up on all the latest news
from round 24. Plus, we'll bring
you full coverage of the
Storm-Knights clash in Monday
Night Football.

TUESDAY

SUPERSTAR CENTRAL

Check out RLW's exclusive
player ratings as well as our
Team of the Week from
round 24, along with all the
fall out from the weekend's
matches.

WEDNESDAY

STATS GOLD

Beat those mid-week blues by
catching up on all the latest
rugby league news from around
the world. You can also check
out all the NRL stats leaders
with our Top 10s.

THURSDAY

RD 25 BLAST OFF!

We unveil RLW's Rising Rookie
from round 24 and bring you all
the latest news in the lead-up to
round 25, which kicks off with
the Rabbitohs v Broncos
blockbuster at ANZ Stadium.

FRIDAY

TIPS AND PREVIEWS

Get all the other late mail for
round 25, including late
inclusions and withdrawals. Plus,
we'll have full coverage of the
big game between the
Sea Eagles and Roosters.

SATURDAY

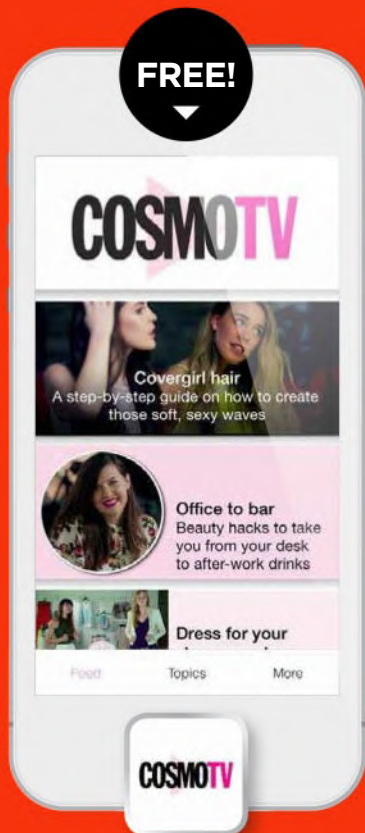
SUPER SATURDAY

We'll bring you the wash-up
from Friday Night Footy at
Brookvale, then provide
comprehensive coverage of the
Eels-Sharks, Knights-Bulldogs
and Storm-Cowboys games.

SUNDAY

SENSATIONAL SUNDAY

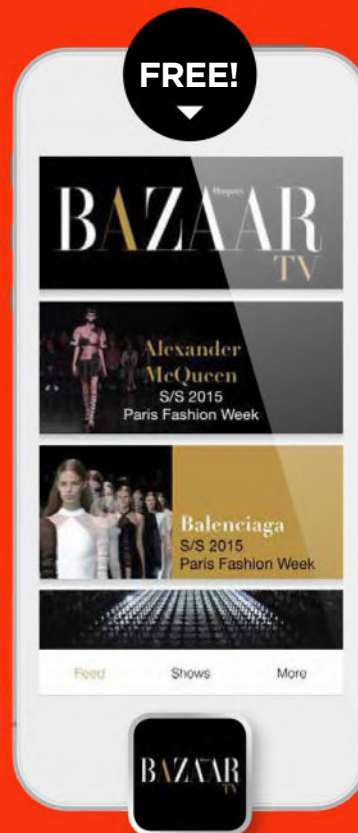
We preview the Tigers-
Warriors and Titans-Dragons
clashes... then log on at
full-time for a comprehensive
wrap-up, plus analysis.



Cosmo TV



Dolly Doctor



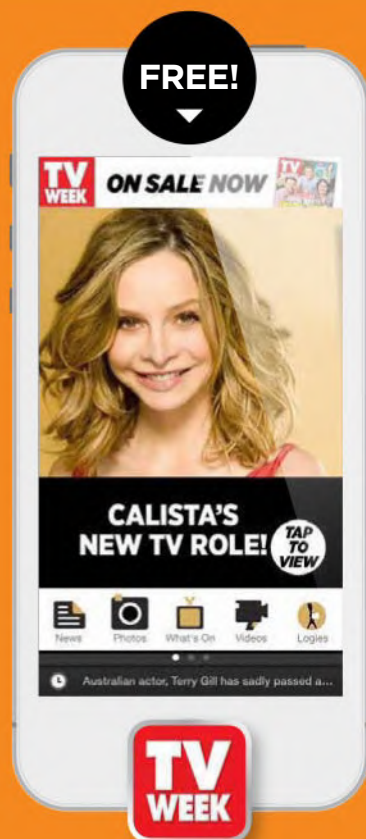
Harper's Bazaar TV



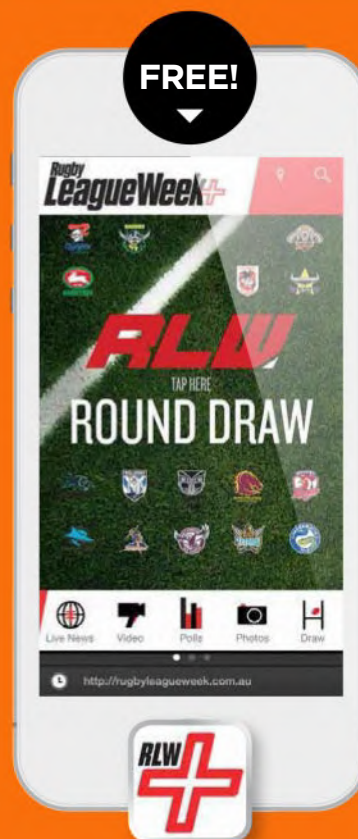
Gourmet Traveller Restaurant Guide 2014



Gourmet Fast



TV Week

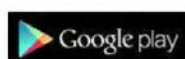


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THE MOLE

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SLAMMIN' SAM WILL CERTAINLY BE A ONE-CLUB MAN

BRONCOS FANS CAN REST assured that off-contract Test forward Sam Thaiday will finish his career in Brisbane – as a one-club man.

There had been speculation in some quarters that the delay in Thaiday's re-signing was due to the club not wanting him, but that's wide of the mark.

The 30-year-old will ink a new deal, with negotiations ongoing and progressing smoothly.

In the past, the management groups of Broncos legends such as Darren Lockyer, Gorden Tallis and Shane Webcke were able to secure third-party agreements with companies in the players' golden years, which enabled them to finish their careers at Red Hill.

Thaiday is in the same situation and is well placed to follow in their footsteps.

The Maroons star's manager, George Mimis, has confirmed his client is set to play his 14th season at the Broncos in 2016.

"The risk factor of Sam not being at the Broncos is virtually zero," Mimis says.

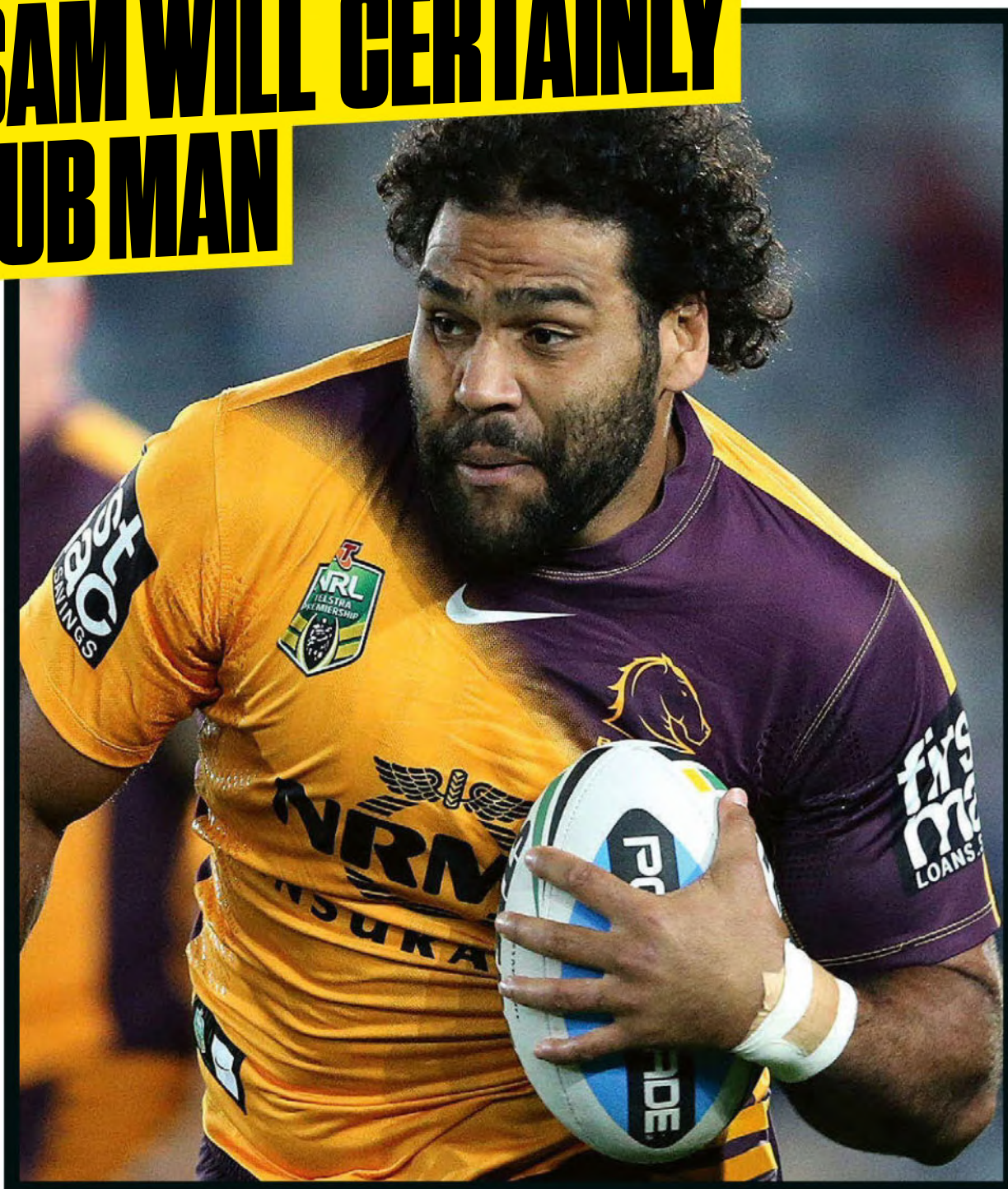
Thaiday, a *RLW* columnist and regular on Channel Nine's *The Footy Show*, has a stellar career in the media awaiting him.

"We have a big-picture strategy around Sam and his business in the short, medium and long term," Mimis says.

"Positioning him commercially and media-wise is part of the bigger plan.

"Sam has terrific camera charisma and a lot of talent in that area.

"I'm sure we will have a lot of fun with that in years to come."



Scan this page for more fresh scoops from The Mole

RUPERT'S RAGE

There are some nervous former greats pacing the floors at Fox Sports following the fallout between News Ltd boss **Rupert Murdoch** and the NRL over TV rights. Murdoch, who owns Fox, is fuming at being left out in the cold as the NRL struck its big-money deal with Channel 9 two weeks ago. Murdoch will still show some live league on Fox – he can't afford not to. But the word I'm hearing from within News Ltd is that he may cut back his commitment to the code. And that means the likes of **Peter Sterling, Ben Ikin, Matty Johns** and co – who have specialist league programs on Fox – could become the innocent victims of Murdoch's rage at the NRL.

TOP TURN-OUT

Matthew and **Andrew Johns** were among the 460 guests at the Mark Hughes Foundation Ball in Newcastle recently, helping raise more than \$100,000 for brain cancer research. **Mark Hughes**, a dual premiership-winner at the Knights, set up the foundation after he was diagnosed with brain cancer in 2013 and has raised more than \$580,000 to date.

MONKEY BUSINESS

Roosters recruit **Joe Burgess** received a rude surprise when he took his young brother and sister to a safari park – two monkeys mating on his car bonnet! The Wigan winger, 20, posted the awkward footage on his Instagram account.

MITCH SWITCH IN LIMBO

The future of out-of-favour Raiders halfback **Mitch Cornish** is still very much up in the air. Seemingly unwanted by the Raiders, the off-contract Cornish has received offers from a couple of English clubs who are among the eight teams playing in The Qualifiers – fighting it out for four spots in Super League next year. Cornish is apparently unwilling to commit because the clubs cannot guarantee their Super League status for next year.



HOT GOSSIP

My mail from the UK is that a fresh betting controversy is about to break soon – involving a former England international. I know the identity of the player and all I can say is watch this space – it will rock the game when his name comes out.

Trent Barrett is obviously confident he will have the Manly coaching job for the long haul. Barrett has just sold the family home on the NSW South Coast and is in the process of buying a very nice pad in Manly territory at Curl Curl. With coaching being such a volatile business, many men involved choose to rent . . . but not Trent!

LEULUAI'S LEARNINGS

Warriors hooker **Thomas Leuluai** hopes to continue his coaching education during a month-long stay in England. The 30-year-old – who wants to move into coaching when he hangs up his boots – is using facilities at former club Wigan to continue his rehab and is hoping he picks up new ideas that he can bring back home. Leuluai had been assisting the Warriors' youngsters while he was sidelined with a knee injury. His English wife, Natalie, is expecting their first child later this year.

LOUSI'S NOT LOUSY

Prop **Sione Lousi** is under contract to the Warriors for another year – but

Brown and out

NATHAN BROWN'S chances of landing the Newcastle job seem to be fading by the day. Last week, Brown phoned the Knights and told them he had booked a family holiday to Bali months ago – but was prepared to stay in Australia if it meant he was about to get the job and then he would be able to hit the ground running. The Knights' response? Go enjoy your break – and Brown is in Bali right now. The two names I'm hearing at the moment are former Broncos coach Anthony Griffin – even though he's been announced as Redcliffe's Intrust Super Cup coach for 2016 – and the dark horse, Storm assistant Justin Morgan.



don't be surprised if he moves on in 2016. The 191cm, 106kg front-rower has spent most of this season in the NSW Cup and the Warriors won't stand in his way if he asks for a release to one of the rival NRL or Super League clubs showing interest.

BRAVE HIRST

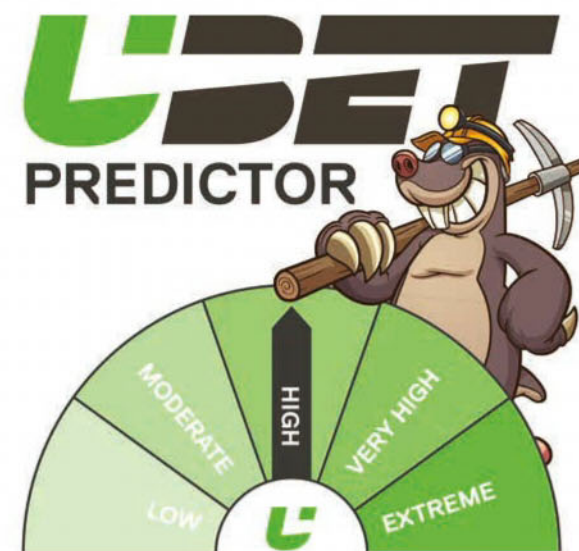
Ian Roberts broke new ground when he became the first openly gay league star back in 1995 – now a British player has followed his lead. Batley Bulldogs skipper **Keegan Hirst** came out last week and has won acclaim throughout Britain for his stance. "At first I couldn't even say 'I'm gay' in my head, let alone out loud," Hirst says. "Now I feel like I'm letting out a long breath that I've held in for a long time."

GIDDY UP, GIDEON

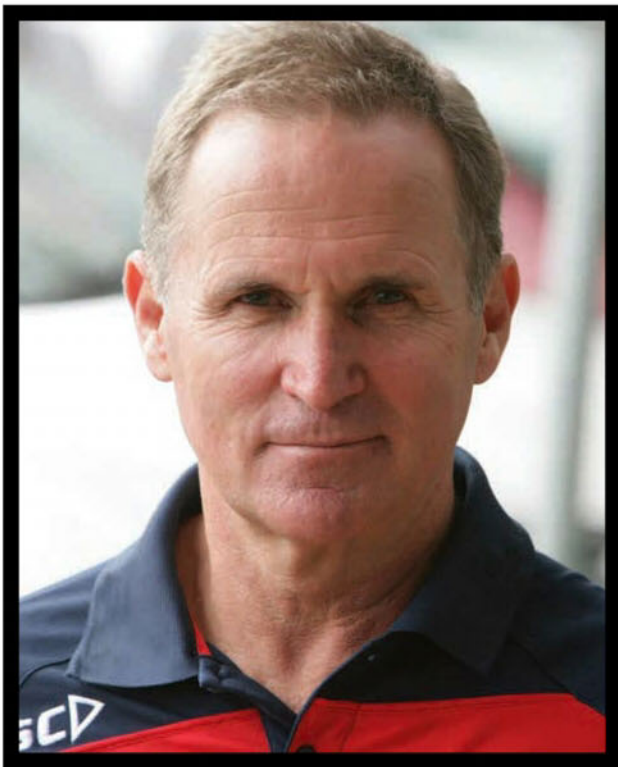
The Cowboys have headed off approaches from rival clubs to re-sign NYC try-scoring freak **Gideon Mosby**. Several clubs were keen to pick up the 18-year-old flanker, who recently shattered the record for most tries in a Holden Cup season with his 31st touchdown. Mosby has signed a new two-year deal and will push for an NRL spot in 2016.

JAMIE'S NOT LYIN' DOWN

Jamie Lyon comes off contract at the end of 2016 – and most people are expecting him to retire, given he turns 35 in January 2017. But the classy Manly centre is telling close mates his body feels great and he may play on, which would make him one of the oldest outside backs league has seen in years.



Chances of Jamie Lyon playing on in 2017



COWS CASH

North Queensland's dynamic dummy-half has been worth every dime



NO.10 KEVIN NAIQAMA (Tigers from Panthers)

Lived in the shadow of his big brother Wes for a few years, following him from the Dragons' junior ranks to Newcastle, then to the Panthers. But this season, with Wes having joined the London Broncos, Kevin has broken out on his own to have a crack with the Wests Tigers – and the move has paid off! While still capable of a poor play or a substandard game, Kevin has proved to be a shining light for the Tigers. Some astonishing finishes have cemented Naiqama the regular NRL spot that eluded him at Newcastle and Penrith. More to come from the Fijian flyer, who has received no media push but achieved through his own deeds.

NO.9 CURTIS RONA (Bulldogs from Cowboys)

Another young fella who has had to do some trekking around before carving out an NRL position. From Perth's SG Ball team to the Roosters' Under-20s and then to the Cowboys – he has covered some kilometres! Rona is, without doubt, the best value-for-money buy of the season. Curtis has been outstanding in the try-scoring department – and pretty good in most aspects for the Doggies. A big future.

NO.8 JACK BIRD (Sharks from Dragons)

Will surely be the Dally M Rookie of the Year, I reckon. Another contender for best value-for-money buy. He's a tremendously versatile player, who

solved a long-term five-eighth problem for the Sharks almost immediately this year. His defence and general toughness were a real contrast to previous contenders for that No.6 jersey. He's made the position his own and, on the back of that, the Sharks have enjoyed a great resurgence towards the play-offs.

NO.7 ANTHONY MILFORD (Broncos from Raiders)

Brisbane desperately wanted the one super junior talent who got away – so they paid for it to happen. Was Milford worth the money? You bet! And that's after only one season from this young champion in the making. He may not have headlined as often as he did for the battling Raiders the previous few seasons, but he's been slowing building and solid in a winning team throughout 2015. On February 19 in RLW, I suggested he could go on to become the NRL's buy of the decade – I haven't seen anything from him since then to suggest that can't be the case. Much, *much* more to come.

NO.6 ADAM BLAIR (Broncos from Tigers)

The biggest turnaround of the season goes to this Kiwi enforcer. Unwanted by the Tigers – perhaps for salary cap reasons – but he's enjoyed immediate success in Brisbane. His top-end talent has led to false expectations – and when those expectations haven't been met, he's copped criticism. But the main thing I have always seen in him since his early days in Melbourne is a high work-rate and footy smarts. And those are the factors that have made him a key to Brisbane's successful season so far.



NO.5 MICHAEL ENNIS (Sharks from Bulldogs)

Some may want to award him the biggest pest in the NRL, but Ennis is one of the reasons for the Sharks' revival this year. Ennis makes every team he plays in competitive. But it's his smarts at dummy-half, especially as the season has worn on, that have impressed me. He's worked out which players to give the ball to more often and this has led to solid improvement in the Shire boys and helped them overcome their biggest hurdle: scoring points. Can he keep doing it in this huge pressure period? Yep. He loves it and thrives on it. You'd have to say the Sharks got the best of the hooker trade with young Michael Lichaa to Canterbury.

NO.4 BLAKE FERGUSON (Roosters)

No Sonny Bill for 2015 . . . but the Roosters found the nearest thing in a like-for-like swap. Ferguson has delivered plenty of big plays on that right edge this year, reminding us of what SBW did so many times for them in the past couple of seasons. The awesome power in his carries has been complemented by some super-charged tackles outside of Mitchell Pearce, shoring up a sometimes weak spot in that edge defence. Can he repeat SBW's ability to turn losing situations into wins in the biggest of matches . . . even a GF? Tall order, that!

IN ON GRANVILLE

NO.3 BLAKE AUSTIN

(Raiders from Tigers)

Has any player over the past decade announced himself more spectacularly than Austin has in 2015? His move from the Panthers to Tigers met with solid success but the next move to Canberra met with *jackpot* success. His attacking skill set was matched only by his self-confidence – exactly what the Green Machine needed. A player who has fired on one or two cylinders in the past, Austin opened up in a big way this year and kicked on into rep footy, too. He's a very individualistic type, though, so the long term will be interesting to watch... but what a season 2015 has been for him!



NO.2 JOSH HODGSON

(Raiders from Hull KR)

When this Pommy rake came over from Super League this year, there was a 'Who?' following every mention of his name. Definitely my winner of the under-the-radar award this year. While Austin has been blowing the socks off footy followers with some magical one-off attacking plays, Hodgson has added intelligence and control to the Green Machine's attack. Those two qualities have been missing from lime-green jerseys for some time. Add to that a fair old work-rate and some real starch to the middle of a previously brittle defence and we're talking one huge influence on this much-improved team.



NO.1 JAKE GRANVILLE

(Cowboys from Broncos)

Since Aaron Payne hung up his dummy-half bag of tricks, the Cowboys have lacked something – especially in big games or big moments. Granville has accepted that role – and done it brilliantly. He is also a contender for comeback of the year, value-for-money buy and even the under-the-radar gong! Many wrote him off when he was playing Queensland Cup footy after failing to crack a regular gig with the Broncos. Not this observer, though – I suggested he was important acquisition for the Cows before the season began.

NQ make Jake their long-term rake

Cowboys ready to lock in their long-locked No.9

BY JOEL GOULD

HE'S THE BEST BUY OF 2015... and now the Cowboys want to make sure star hooker Jake Granville doesn't become a super signing for another club in 2017.

Granville inked a two-year deal with North Queensland at the start of the season, and is now set to extend his stay in Townsville beyond 2016.

The Cowboys have met with Granville's management for preliminary talks about upgrading next year's deal and extending his contract until the end of 2018.

Other clubs are circling but the 26-year-old has a strong bond with coach Paul Green, who coached him to two premierships at Wynnum Manly in the Intrust Super Cup in 2011 and 2012.

Green recruited Granville from the Broncos at the end of last season and will ensure his gun No.9 remains with North Queensland.

While maestro Johnathan Thurston is the master puppeteer of the Cowboys side, former Test hooker Ben Elias insists

Granville is the reason JT has been even more dominant in 2015.

"Granville is the unsung superstar of that team, without a doubt," Elias enthuses.

"It's not a fluke that JT has done so well this year. Granville has taken enormous pressure off him and demands respect when he gets into dummy-half.

"The other teams now are name-dropping him and second-guessing what he's going to do. That gives JT more leeway. We know he's a great player, but he's able to have more freedom to do his thing this year because of young Granville."

Elias says the combination between the duo is one the Cowboys must keep together long term.

"What I've found impressive is the combination and understanding they have already got, and it seems to get stronger and stronger," he says.

"They talk about the nine, seven, six and one – but the nine and seven are like Peter and Paul, the yin and yang.

"Granville's tough, competitive, very strong in defence and he's got good vision. There isn't a blight on his game.

"He owns that No.9 position, so the Cowboys are smart if they are going to keep him long-term." **RLW**



BAD NEWS FOR THE BLUES

Billy Slater brushes off injury concerns to declare himself hungry for more Origin glory **BY GREG PRICHARD**

SUPERSTAR BILLY SLATER says he has no intention of quitting representative footy in the near future and that he's not under any pressure from the Melbourne Storm to give it away.

Major injury combined with advancing years sometimes changes the focus of players, who have been known to stop playing reps to concentrate on their club careers. Slater is 32 and has missed the second half of this season because of a shoulder injury that required surgery. He also needed shoulder surgery at the end of last season.

But Slater tells *RLW* he plans to proceed as normal next year – with the aim of playing fullback for Queensland and Australia again.

“Oh, look, (quitting rep footy) is something I'll have to think about getting close to the end of my career,” Slater says. “I'd love to sit here and say I'll play representative football for the rest of my career, but whether that's a realistic option for me I'm not too sure.

“But in the short term I don't feel like giving representative football away. I'm still extremely excited every time I get picked to play for Queensland and every time I get to represent my country.

“I pushed myself really hard to play for Australia this year, but my shoulder didn't come up in time and I missed out. Fortunately, though, I got the chance to play for Queensland in the first two games of the Origin series.

“No, definitely not ready to hang up my representative boots just yet. Maybe down the track I might think of that sort of stuff, but not at the moment.”

Slater says the Storm, particularly coach Craig Bellamy understand and support players' rep ambitions.

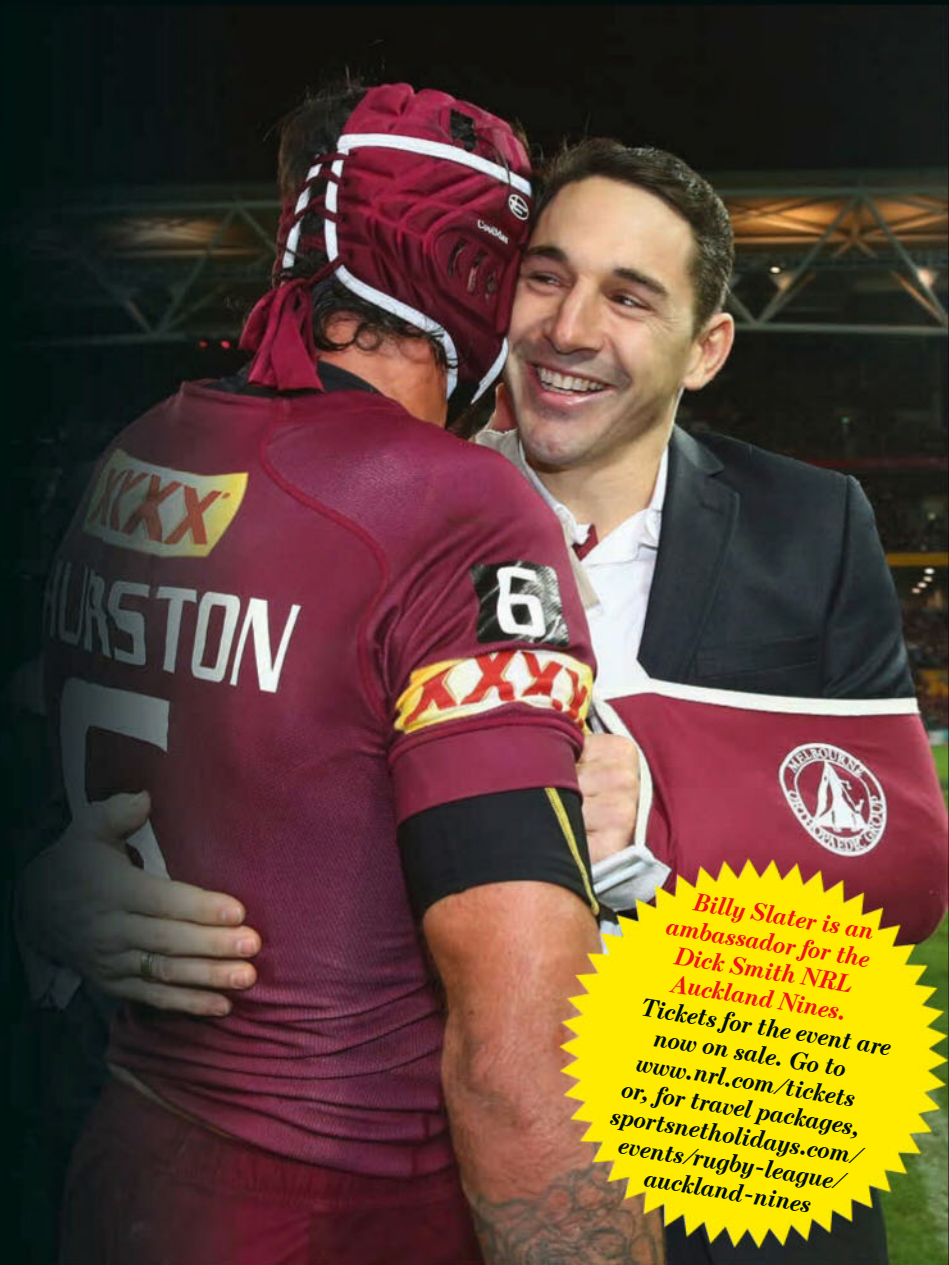
It can be a drain on clubs, but at the same time if you don't have great players on your playing roster you can't win premierships.

“The Storm have been great through my career and, to my knowledge, for all other players who want to play rep football,” Slater says. “They're very supportive of that. Even the fact I was entering the Origin arena with an issue with my shoulder, they were extremely comfortable with that. They know what Origin is about, they know what representative football is about and how important it is to us players, so they respect that decision. Obviously they're the guys that suffer the consequences (if players are missing due to rep commitments), but they do understand the situation and Craig is a big believer in that if a player wants to play representative football it's not up to him or the club to pressure him otherwise.”

Slater aims to make his comeback for Melbourne in the Auckland Nines tournament on February 6-7. He didn't play in the event in 2014 because of extra rest after the World Cup and this year he was still recovering from surgery. But he says he'll be ready to go this time and that there's no risk of him being edgy about taking the big hits following the two shoulder surgeries.

“When I've got an injury, once it's fixed I'm fine,” he says. “Mentally, there's not a worry in the world. When you're carrying an injury, there may be a slight thought in the back of your mind, but that's just natural. But when you're out there, your instincts take over.

“The operation went well. The surgeon was happy and the physios are happy with where I'm at. I'm about eight weeks post-surgery and the body's feeling good.” **RLW**



Billy Slater is an ambassador for the Dick Smith NRL Auckland Nines. Tickets for the event are now on sale. Go to www.nrl.com/tickets or, for travel packages, sportsnetholidays.com/events/rugby-league/auckland-nines

IF KLEMMER CAN KILL IT, THEN SO CAN I

Friendly fire has Shaun Lane primed

BY JOEL GOULD

HE TOOK ONE LOOK AT BIG DAVE KLEMMER in the pre-season and realised he was taller and faster than him.

Then he tackled the 'Beast of Belmore' at training and knew he possessed the physicality to match him.

They were the moments of self-realisation that made tall-timber Bulldogs edge forward Shaun Lane realise he could make it in the NRL.

In his debut season the two-metre-tall 20-year-old has come on in leaps and bounds. There is some debate over how tall he is compared to Klemmer, with the NRL Media Guide having the Beast of Belmore at 197cm and other sites at 200cm. But Lane, who has grown this year, reckons he has him covered.

“I've got him by a centimetre, but he has a couple of kilos on me,” he grins.

“But I've learned a lot from Klemmer, just

with his aggression and his mentality. He thinks he can take on anyone. But I see myself as a similar size, and I'm a bit faster than him.

“So why can't I do similar things? That's the way I have looked at it. I got a chance to tackle 'Klem' and run at him in the pre-season and I could see that he wasn't miles ahead of me.

“It made me realise that I could go with the big boys. Klem is a different character to me, but the way he came through the system is similar to me. He got his crack at a young age and he has really taken it by the horns.

“I just want to look to do the same thing, although Klemmer is more of a middle player and I take it up on the edges.”

Lane has fully recovered from a syndesmosis injury that caused him to miss half of last season.

He's relishing playing alongside the likes of Klemmer, Frank Pritchard, Sam Kasiano, James

Graham, Greg Eastwood and Aiden Tolman – one of the biggest packs of the modern era.

“The thing is they are not just big, they are skilful with it,” Lane says. “But Canterbury have always had that idea where if you have enough forwards, then go out and sign another one. It's that old 'Dogs of War' mentality to play through the forwards and in the end you will come out on top. We've carried that through since the 1980s. Our success looks like continuing and I'd love to stay. I have signed until the end of next year but I hope to have a long future here.”

The Bulldogs have no intention of letting Lane out of the Kennel.

“He was a Cronulla junior who we picked up two or three years ago and he's just battled away and battled away,” Bulldogs recruitment chief Noel Cleal says. “We always knew he had something.” **RLW**

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EXPANSION BOMBSHELL!

Redcliffe Dolphins ready to launch shock bid to become Brisbane's second NRL team

EXCLUSIVE: BY JOEL GOULD

THERE'S A SHARK ALERT on the eastern seaboard of Australia right now. But when the NRL finally calls for expansion during the next TV broadcast deal, it is the dolphin – of the Redcliffe variety – that will surface. All the other expansion bid teams can consider themselves warned!

The Redcliffe Dolphins may not have made much noise in the race to become the second Brisbane team in the NRL, but the appointment of former Broncos coach Anthony Griffin as their Intrust Super Cup coach for 2016 was also made with an eye firmly to an NRL future for the club.

Leaked details of the whole-of-game blueprint being created by NRL strategy chief Shane Richardson reveal he sees a future for a Perth team and a fourth side in Queensland.

Channel Nine boss David Gyngell said recently the Queensland capital is the logical place for expansion and backed a second Brisbane side.

When announcing the \$925 million broadcast deal with Channel Nine from 2018, NRL

chief executive David Smith said: "There have been discussions about whether we introduce a 17th team and there is scope to do that in this contract."

Before the late Redcliffe legend Arthur Beetson linked with the Western Corridor NRL bid, he spoke to *RLW* about why the Dolphins could be a force in the NRL. He even asked us to contact his good mate John Singleton to see if he would fund a bid.

Singleton said at the time that he'd had enough of being given the runaround by the NRL with his Central Coast plans and was not keen to get involved.

But he did say that a Redcliffe NRL side would work.

Redcliffe Dolphins president Bob Jones, a former hooker who played 105 first-grade games for the club, says an NRL side remains on the club's agenda.

The Dolphins have a wonderful brand, a rich history, a state-of-the-art training base and a highly successful leagues club that gives them financial clout to rival many NRL clubs. Redcliffe have won five Queensland Cup premierships, the last when Griffin was coach in 2006. For them it is a matter of flicking the switch to 'go' when the NRL eventually calls for another club in Brisbane.

"We have crunched the numbers and done a fair bit of homework about what an NRL bid would cost, and it has been on our board's plate for quite a few years," Jones says.

"We had some preliminary discussions with the NRL but we made a conscious decision not to spend any money on it until the NRL calls for expansion.

"But it's not just something we have thought about in the last five minutes. It goes back 10 years at

RED-AND-WHITE DELIGHT

Redcliffe hooker Shane Pumipi fires out a pass for the Dolphins. If the club has their way, they will become Brisbane's second NRL team when expansion takes place.

least when we spoke to Arthur about it.

"A Redcliffe NRL bid is something Anthony is excited about and he's had that experience with the Broncos and Storm.

"He has a better understanding of NRL systems now than when he left us. We had some deep conversations about it when we appointed him, about what we will need to do if and when the NRL announce expansion.

"His appointment was made with that in mind, although it wasn't the sole reason."

The Dolphins have just received a \$4 million funding commitment from the federal government towards a \$12 million, 10,000-seat stadium at Dolphin Oval which would be the training base for an NRL side.

"The plan will always be to play out of Suncorp Stadium, and when I was playing we used to play there every second week, so that's not strange for Redcliffe people," Jones says. "I just think we have the infrastructure that none of the other clubs have. We have professional physios that have practices on our site, we've got a swimming pool, rehab pool and a gym that an NRL side would use.

"We have a junior base and affiliate clubs that all feed in from the north side of Brisbane, so we have a good start from that point of view."

A trump card is the Dolphin brand, as the Gold Coast Titans discovered when their original plan to be named the Dolphins collapsed when Redcliffe threatened legal action.

"At the time we didn't fully understand how powerful and widely known our Dolphin brand was, and is," Jones says.

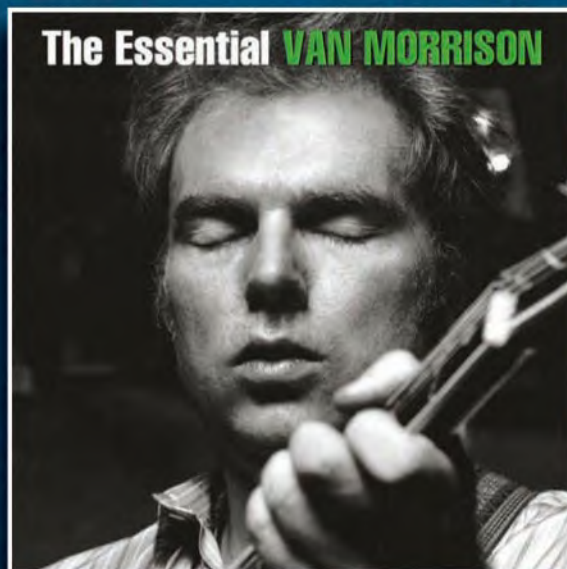
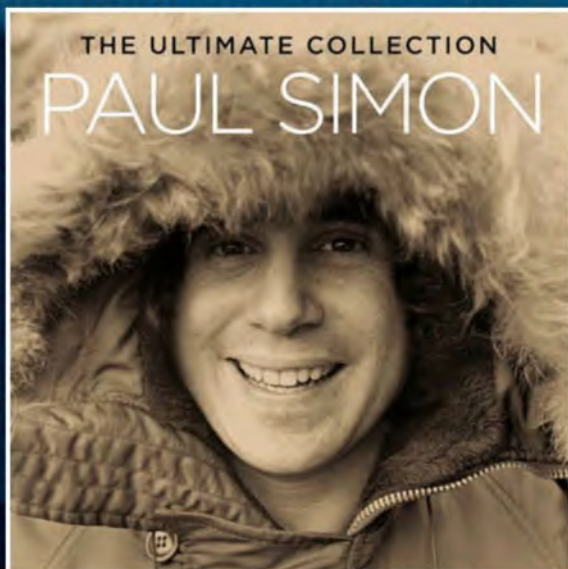
"We engaged some marketing teams to do some research and the only brands ahead of us in Queensland were the Broncos and Brisbane Lions. But the Dolphins brand was more widely known the Queensland Bulls cricket team and the rugby side (Super 15 franchise Queensland Reds)."

The Western Corridor, Brisbane Bombers and Brothers Leprechauns bids are already well under way with their plans.

"But we have a lot of things in place as a base," Jones says. "We have all the stuff that the other bid teams don't. They know that – and the NRL knows it as well." **RLW**



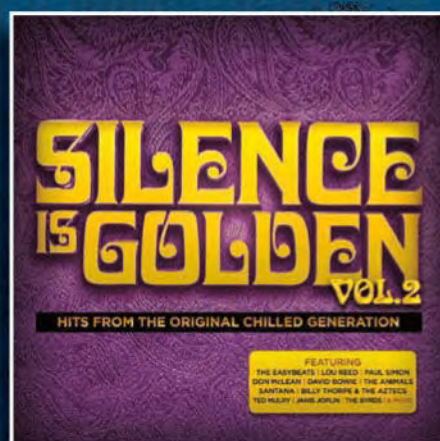
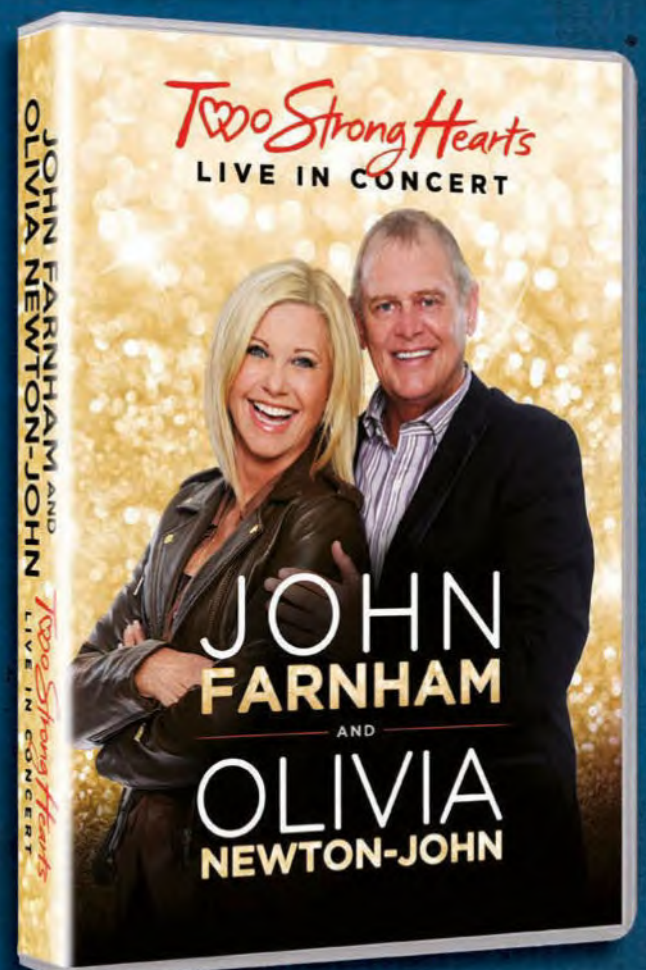
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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE BE UPSTANDING FOR ...

The 2015 **BEAU RYAN** *Awards*

Forget the Dally Ms and the Golden Boot, *these* are the most significant rugby league gongs of season 2015.

How special? Well, *RLW* managed to convince our favourite funnyman to let us turn him into a human trophy! That's pretty special.

It's been another crazy year in the Greatest Game of All.

We've seen backflips and pirate beards. Big personalities and big hits. And who can forget the afternoon Big Willie had Little Willie grabbed during a game.

Oh, and there's been some pretty good footy played along the way, too.

So, without further ado, here they are, folks – the weirdest, wackiest and most wonderful awards of the year.



[Continued Page 18]



Best Player

Cameron Smith has finished the season in superb form and was a standout in the final Origin game. Roger Tuivasa-Sheck has been dancing around opponents like Usher in a music video and Aaron Woods has not been put on the ground since round 14. But the best player in 2015 has undoubtedly been **Johnathan Thurston**. He has been classy, precise, professional . . . and slightly handsome.

Best Rookie

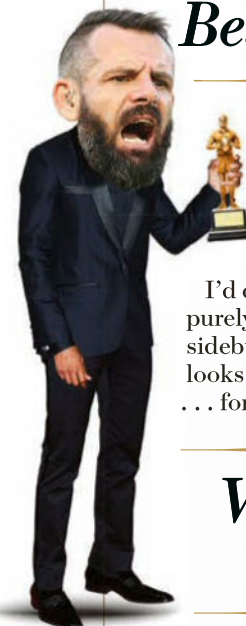
The Trbojevic boys at Manly have been terrific, particularly at the back-end of the year. Kane Elgey looks like a future Origin player and he has helped the Titans get out of trouble a few times. Not only on the field but he has been doing the accounting upstairs in administration, as well as organising which player gets to host training in their backyard each week. Euan Aitken from the Dragons has had a few defensive efforts that Chuck Norris would be proud of, while Josh Hodgson is a typical Pommy – tough, passionate and a little bit ugly. But who can go past **Jack Bird**? He has had half a dozen man-of-the-match performances and has been a breath of fresh air for the Sharkies. Only problem now is Paul Gallen has just re-signed for half the salary cap, so Jack will probably sign with the Roosters.



Biggest Hit

Sia Soliola ironed out Luke Brooks at Leichhardt with a bell nger. Sammy Thaiday got a good piece of Jared Waerea-Hargreaves at Suncorp earlier in the year . . . before Jared got one back. Frank Ritchard from the Dogs teamed up with Greg Eastwood to put on some big hits in the Good Friday classic as well. But for me, the hit of the year was definitely Wests Tigers hitman **Marty Taupau** . . . when Big Marty was actually carrying the ball! 'Kapow' Taupau took a short pass against the Rabbitohs, made a linebreak then gave Rabbitohs fullback Alex Johnston the biggest fend I've ever witnessed. It was in the throat and Alex landed a perfect 10/10 backflip. But Alex is OK – the only problem is that he sounds a bit like Gary Larson now and he still gets headaches when Tigers games are on.

Best Referee



The best referee is always the one you don't notice. It's hard to pick a 'best' referee when they're all so poor, but if I had to, I'd choose **Gavin Badger** – purely because of his beard/sideburns combo. I like it. He looks like quite a likeable guy . . . for a ref.

Weirdest Player

Konrad Hurrell is hilarious, but extremely weird. You have to keep an eye on the ones that are always funny. They get real weird at times.





Best Haircut

Blake Austin was miles in front with about six weeks remaining. His undercut/goatee combination is a force to be reckoned with. Jack de Belin's haircut was quite trendy until he became the laughing stock of the NRL. I don't mind Beau Scott's style – shaved nice and short all over, with a slice of devon at the back. BJ Leilua looks like one of the Last of the Mohicans when he has his hair out – and that's great because I like that movie. All of these are exceptional and outstanding but none are close to **Jorge Taufua's** Jerry curls, which are kept out of his face by a six-year-old's hair elastic. Absolutely brilliant, Jorgey!

Best Facial Hair

It was going to be pretty hard to beat Gavin Badger and Blake Austin . . . until Melbourne's **Tohu Harris** came along. I actually like his five o'clock shadow – the only drama is you don't know where his fringe stops and beard starts. Very hairy – and very, very impressive.



Angriest Player

Paul Gallen has usually been quite angry, but now he has a new deal and new dyed hair he has been pretty timid. Nathan Peats is quite angry on the field and his replacement Isaac De Gois has an angry-looking face, even though he's a gentle guy. Maybe it's his eyebrows. Nathan Friend can get a little bit of small man syndrome, too. But the angriest man of the year is **David Shillington** – his head-butt on Aaron Woods in the dying minutes of his 200th game proved he has some underlying anger problems. Still a cool guy, though.



Ugliest Player



Jeremy Latimore has been terrific for the Panthers off the bench. A real shining light. Wonderful guy. Great heart. And a mate of mine. It's just that he has been smacked directly in the face with the ugly stick. You can't win them all.

Most Metrosexual

Corey Parker. He looks better and better every year. Dresses very well off the field, I'm told. Always looks tanned and never has a hair out of place – even though it's whiter than Ray Warren's. Credits his great looks to moisturiser, chia seeds and botox. In that order.



Craziest Player

Cooper Cronk. The best halfback in the world. Has routine drummed into him. Eats the same thing all the time, sleeps the same amount of minutes every day and does the same training prep for each game. Borderline Rain Man.



Worst Body Odour

I can only go on what I have smelt first-hand and I would have to go with **Sosaia Feki**, the Cronulla winger. Only player to put on deodorant at half-time. His favourite position is lock/back-row but cannot play there because his team-mates refuse to pack into a scrum with him.



Best/Worst Tattoo

Best and worst tattoo is on the same person: **Joel Thompson** from the Dragons. From afar, some of his tattoos are the best to look at. But if you get close and take a peek, you will realise there are more spelling mistakes than Andrew Johns' High School Certificate exam.



Best Dressed Player

Dylan Napa from the Roosters dresses like my dad did when he went to Woodstock with his mates. But he makes a great impression on his fellow players. Very, very hard to beat.



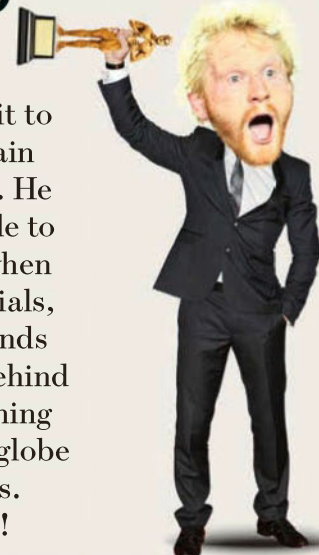
Best Quote/Comment

Jamie Soward: 'It's Chicken Time!'



The 2015 BEAU RYAN Man of the Year

Finally, we get to the big award for 2015. I give it to Bulldogs captain **James Graham.** He was told it's rude to point, so now when he talks to officials, he keeps his hands planted firmly behind his back – teaching kids all over the globe good manners. What a man!



WIN!



We're giving away this gold ball – personally signed by Beau Ryan – to one lucky reader. Simply tell us in 25 words or less who is your 2015 NRL Man of the Year and why. Send your entries to rlw@bauer-media.com.au or mail to: RLW Gold Ball comp, GPO Box 4088, Sydney, NSW 2001. Entries close Monday, August 31. Winner will be announced in the September 10 issue of RLW

2015 RLW FANS POLL

You've had your say – and now the results are in! Once again, we had a massive response to the *RLW* Fans' Poll this year. Hot on the heels of the 2015 Players' Poll, we asked you for your thoughts on the Greatest Game of All: Who is the best player to who is the most over-rated; your favourite club to the one you love to hate; who'll win the comp to whether DCE duded the Titans... and all the other big issues in the game. Here's what you reckon!

Who is the best player in the NRL?

Johnathan Thurston 72%

Greg Inglis 7%
Shaun Johnson 4%
Cameron Smith 2%
Roger Tuivasa-Sheck 2%
Others 13%



Who is your favourite NRL player?

Johnathan Thurston 9%

Shaun Johnson 6%
Greg Inglis 6%
James Tedesco 3%
Corey Parker 3%
Roger Tuivasa-Sheck 3%
Paul Gallen 3%
Blake Austin 3%
Jared Waerea-Hargreaves 3%
Ben Hunt 2%
Others 59%

Who has been the best buy in the NRL for the 2015 season?

Blake Austin 45%

Jake Granville 12%
Anthony Milford 10%
Michael Ennis 8%
Blake Ferguson 3%
Others 22%

Who is the best coach in the NRL?

Wayne Bennett 44%,
Trent Robinson 15%, Craig Bellamy 10%,
Des Hasler 6%, Michael Maguire 6%,
Others 19%

Who will be the 2015 NRL premiers?

Cowboys 31%

Roosters 30%
Broncos 18%
Bulldogs 7%
Sharks 6%
Others 8%

Who is the best rookie in the NRL in 2015?

Jack Bird 28%

Tuimoala Lolohea 7%
Tom Trbojevic 7%
Jake Trbojevic 6%
Valentine Holmes 6%
Others 46%



Who is your favourite TV commentator?

Ray Warren 48%

Andrew Voss 36%
Warren Smith 9%
Ray Hadley 4%
Matt Russell 2%
Others 1%

Which NRL club do you support?

Broncos 13%

Warriors 9%
Roosters 9%
Rabbitohs 8%
Bulldogs 7%
Cowboys 7%
Sharks 7%
Dragons 6%
Sea Eagles 6%
Tigers 6%
Eels 5%
Raiders 4%
Storm 3%
Knights 3%
Panthers 3%
Titans 3%
Others 1%



Which NRL club do you hate the most?

Sea Eagles 25%

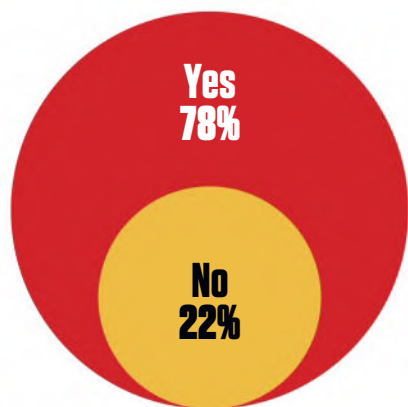
Roosters 13%
Bulldogs 12%
Rabbitohs 11%
Broncos 11%
Others 28%

What country do you live in?

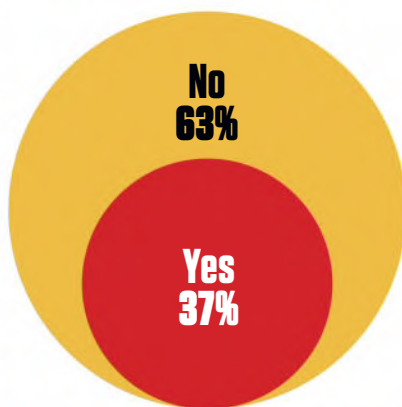
Australia 84.8%

New Zealand 12.1%
UK 1.0%, US 0.7%
PNG 0.3%
Others 1.1%

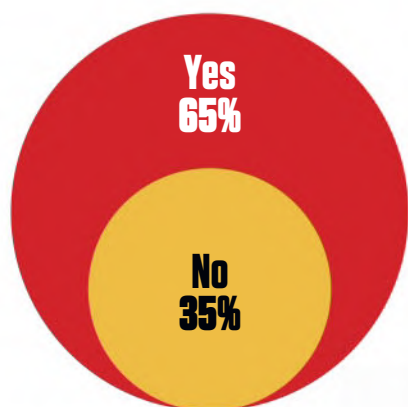
Did Daly Cherry-Evans dud the Titans?



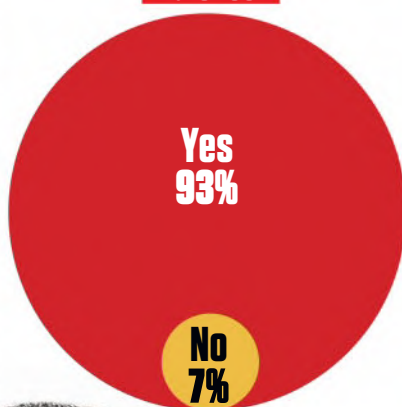
Has the NRL become boring to watch in 2015?



Should State of Origin be played on stand-alone weekends?



Should suburban grounds such as Leichhardt, Kogarah and Brookvale still be used for NRL matches?



Who is the most over-rated player in the NRL?

Mitchell Pearce 13%
 Daly Cherry-Evans 12%
 Paul Gallen 6%
 Greg Inglis 5%
 Others 64%



WINNER!

Congratulations to **Emily Styles**, who was randomly selected to win four tickets to this year's NRL grand final. Thanks to everyone who responded to the 2015 RLW Fans' Poll either online or by filling out the form in the August 3 issue of RLW.

Life in Healthy Balance



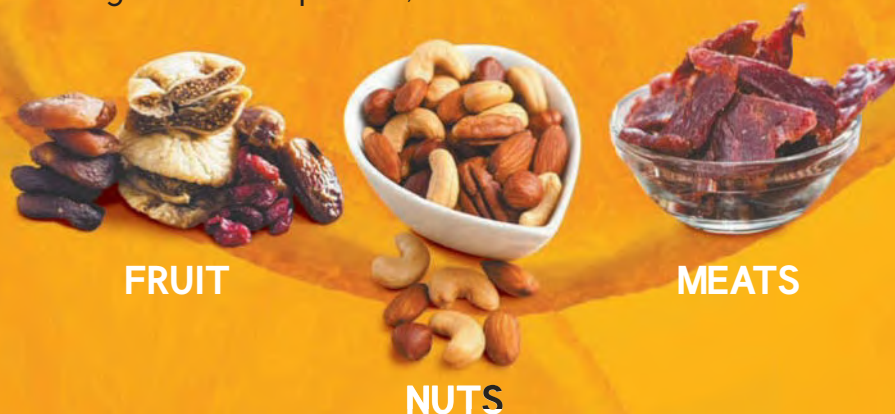
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The holiday is over for Sopoaga ...

But the fun is just beginning as the Panthers back-rower achieves his boyhood dream **BY TONY ADAMS**

GROWING UP AS A KID IN NEW Zealand, Tupou Sopoaga would holiday each year in Sydney with his parents.

And forget the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge, young Tupou was drawn to a special place way out west: Penrith Park.

"You could say it was my field of dreams," Sopoaga recalls.

"We had family out Penrith way and stayed with them and the Panthers had a great team. I fell in love with them.

"I grew up idolising guys like Rhys Wesser, Frank Pritchard and Tony Puletua.

"It was exciting for a kid from Wellington, where there was hardly any rugby league."

Fast forward a decade and Sopoaga has realised a lifetime ambition – running out on that same special field playing for the Panthers in the NRL.

After stints at the Bulldogs and Sharks, the hard-running second-rower made his debut for the Panthers in round 22 against the Eels in Darwin.

"It took me a few clubs and a few years to get here, but I'm so excited I have got to achieve my dream of playing for Penrith," the 23-year-old says.

"I had a couple of years in the Holden Cup at the Bulldogs and played some NRL at the Sharks for the past two years.

"But when the opportunity to join Penrith came up last summer, I jumped at it.

"It's been great to break into the first-grade team and (coach) Ivan Cleary has been fantastic to me.

"I regard him among the best coaches in the NRL and think he can really take my game to the next level."

Sopoaga played most of his early football in the union ranks and made the New Zealand Schoolboys side in 2010.

"Wellington is a rugby town, so I found it hard to get a game of league," he says.

"But the Bulldogs noticed me there and gave me my chance, so it worked out well.

"I came over straight after I left school in 2011 and it was quite an experience.



"I played for the Cook Islands against the USA in America in 2013 and that was a great honour – it was my mum's homeland and it meant a lot to the family."

Rivalry between the rugby codes is big in the Sopoaga family, especially between Tupou and his older brother.

"My brother Lima plays Super Rugby for the Highlanders and I have another two younger brothers who also play rugby," Tupou says.

"They keep saying league players aren't the smartest but I give them as good as I get." **RLW**

BEDSY DESPERATE TO HAIL ANOTHER CHIEF

NEWCASTLE CARETAKER

coach Danny Buderus has revealed he is challenging his props to become the next Paul Harragon, Mark Sargent or Tony Butterfield.

Speaking a few weeks into his temporary tenure as the replacement for sacked Rick Stone, Buderus says fans in the steel city expect to see an enforcer when they go to watch the Knights play.

"They're fantastic, our fans, and they're just crying out for – and craving for – a team they can embrace," says the decorated hooker. "I've challenged a couple of big boys in our pack. The fans are craving for a big guy to really latch onto.

"They've had that over the years with your Sargents, your Harragons, your Butterfields. These guys, it's their turn.

"It's their turn to make history and be one of these players. We're just driving those standards.

"We've got one more home game (against the Bulldogs this Saturday) and I'm sure they'll all turn up for old boys' day. They're fantastic, our supporters."

The Knights led St George Illawarra at half-time of Buderus' first game in charge, mounted a spirited comeback against the Roosters in the second, and beat the Wests Tigers in the third.

"I said 'there's a pulse' and they can look each other in the eye," Buderus says. "That's all I've been after this last six weeks.

"But the way they make their errors and they're beating themselves, it really hurts. It hurts the players, it hurts the fans and especially the coaching staff.

"The errors they're making, they're play-one errors and the way possession is in the modern game, it's so crucial, so important."

STEVE MASCORD

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★ ★ ★ ★ ★

RUGBY
LEAGUE WEEK
RETRO HEROES

Steve Renouf

BORN: June 8, 1970, Murgon, Qld
PREMIERSHIP DEBUT

For Brisbane v Balmain at Lang Park,
Rd 3, 1989.

CLUB FOOTY Brisbane Broncos 1989-99,
194 matches, 155 tries, 620 points;
Wigan 2000-01, 27 matches, 20 tries,
80 points.

REP FOOTY Queensland 1991-94,
1996-98, 11 Origins, 2 tries, 8 points and
2 Super League Tri-series games, 2 tries,
8 points; Australia 1992-94, 1997-98,
10 Tests and World Cup matches,
11 tries, 44 points; 1 Super League Test;
8 tour matches, 11 tries, 44 points.
GRAND TOTAL 253 games, 201 tries,
804 points.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Rugby
LeagueWeek

Justin Hodges – Broncos
Thanks for the memories







THROWBACK TO THE FUTURE

Manly's budding book-end Jake Trbojevic is equal parts old-school warrior and new-age warhorse

BY JOEL GOULD

JAKE TRBOJEVIC IS A rugby league conundrum. A living, breathing, crash-tackling contradiction. On one hand, the Mona Vale product is a throwback to one of Manly's all-time greats. But on the other, he's also the prototype prop of the future. Equal parts Terry Randall clone and new-age warhorse with a unique physiology.

The 21-year-old rising star has the old-school style of 'Igor' Randall . . . but he's no dinosaur.

"Jake is a very exciting prospect in terms of his physiology and mentality," long-time Sea Eagles trainer Don Singe says.

"With modern training techniques, he's going to be one of these warhorses that has longevity."

Sea Eagles legend Graham

Eadie insists Trbojevic is an "Igor clone" with the way he sits opponents on their bums.

"Trbojevic reminds me of Terry Randall with the way he tackles low. Seven or eight times out of 10 the bloke Igor tackled would drop the ball," Eadie says.

"Jake has his impact down pat, where he hits in under the ball is and they are popping it. He's very old school but there's still a place for that in the modern game."

According to Singe, Trbojevic is a natural footballer – a player whose stamina, power and tenacity outweigh the fact that he's not a perfect physical specimen.

"His brother Tom gets his shirt off and you can see he has a strong physique, which will develop into a muscular, athletic shape," Singe says. "Jake doesn't have that out-of-the-box, muscular Terminator physique . . . but he's one of those guys who is very powerful because he has great physiology and can call on power very quickly."

"He has great technique, because he loves the game and he loves the contest. What's on the outside of the body is form and shape, but what's on the inside of Jake's body is tenacity. We know he has got that because of his ability to repeat hit and make consistent tackles

and contacts with very consistent power and force. Some players go *whack, whack, whack* and you see a depletion of the force they apply because fatigue sets in.

"But Jake has physiological capabilities, like a Watmough, to refuel his lactate system and go again. Most guys would say, 'You've made your run. What are you doing following up?' But Jake's always looking for more."

With the ball, Trbojevic doesn't look like he's moving fast. But appearances are deceptive.

"If you take his GPS reading and measure the metres he covers, you find he is moving very fast," Singe says. "If you are standing in front

MR NATURAL

Sea Eagles rookie Jake Trbojevic isn't as ripped as other blokes but he rips in like his life depends on it.

of him trying to stop him, he looks like he's moving even faster. He spends a lot of time with Matt Ballin and Jamie Lyon and that's a great place to be because they are such outstanding examples of men, application and professionalism. Jake loves to learn. He doesn't have much to say but I'm very impressed with how much he's willing to listen.

"At training he's happiest when he's out there doing some opposed work because nothing gives you the same reactive capabilities as working against other men. You don't get to make decisions on what their speed is going to be, you don't get to make the decision on whether they are going left or right and you certainly don't get to make the decision on how hard the contact is going to be. You need to have all the natural abilities and reactive attributes firing, and he has them."

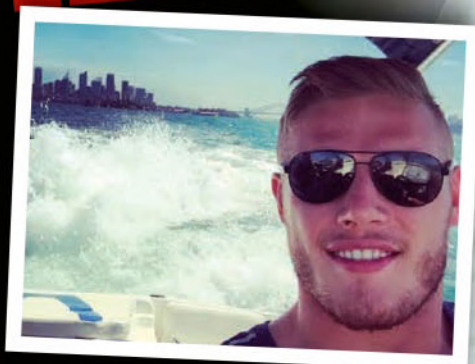
Randall admits there are many things he doesn't like about today's game . . . but he loves big Jake.

"Jake's style of tackling really makes me pleased. It brings back memories of the old days," Randall says. "I love his stamina and his ability to tackle properly."

"Jake has that natural ability to knock blokes over and do it consistently." **RLW**

"Jake doesn't have that out-of-the-box, muscular Terminator physique . . . but he's very powerful because he has great physiology" – Don Singe

NOW FOR MY NEXT ADVENTURE



Life is good at the Rabbitohs for Tom Burgess . . . but who knows where it will take him a bit further down the track

BY GREG PRICHARD

TOM BURGESS IS VERY close to his family – it's one of the tightest units you could imagine – but at the same time he's very much an individual.

He's a man who wants to see the world, which is why we should make the most of enjoying what he does in the NRL, because one day – sooner than South Sydney fans would hope – he might be off to do something else, somewhere else on the planet.

For now, Burgess is a 23-year-old Englishman living in Sydney and loving it. But there are other places he's seen that he likes as well – and others he wants to see.

Other codes he might consider playing, as well. Rugby union, NFL. The world is his oyster and he's not planning to lock himself down to

anything for too long at this stage. "I've sort of just planned for next year and I'll just see how it's going then," Burgess tells *RLW*. "I'll just take it as a year at a time, really."

"I've not really got any preference, to be honest. I love Sydney and I think I could see myself living in Sydney for a long time, but as far as my career goes I don't know. I've not thought about it too much yet."

"I'm going to keep all the options open, including the other codes. The talk about the NFL has been out there already. I've got a lot of interest in the other codes and I really like America, so I was looking at NFL and that was one thing that sort of came up, but I've not been down that route yet. I might look at it in the next few years."

"Rugby union is obviously another possibility. Sam going back over to England to play union gives a good little insight for me into how it works and everything. He's like the testimony for us, he'll come back and tell us – a bit like when he came over to Australia first and told us what it was like. But I won't want to look like I'm following Sam. I'll do whatever's suited to me at the time."

Asked what he loves most about living in Sydney, Burgess smiles. You know the answer is going to be multi-faceted.

"It's got to be the weather," he says. "It can be a bit depressing in England, a bit cold sometimes, so . . . people talk about the winter here, but it's nothing like what we get in England. The women are nice over here as well, you know (laughs). And you've got the beaches. It's a pretty cool city to live in . . . the weather, the beaches, the people."

But then there's the rest of the world to consider and Burgess is gradually making sure he gets his fill. Whether another place takes his fancy so much he wants to move there, we'll have to wait and see.

"In the last off-season I went to America and I loved it," he says. "Three weeks around America, went to all the main cities – New York, LA, Vegas, Miami. I hit all the main spots. It was awesome. I went to an NFL game in Philadelphia – the Eagles and the Seahawks."

"I wouldn't mind going back and visiting a few other places as well, like Boston, but I reckon the next place to visit would probably be South America. Totally different

RUNAWAY RABBIT

Big Tom Burgess is killing it up front for Souths this year, but whether he stays in Australia beyond 2016 remains to be seen; if he does leave, he'll have plenty of reminders of what he'll be missing out on, though (inset).

culture – it would be good to experience that a little bit."

At the end of this year, though, Burgess is hoping for a league-related trip back home to England to play in the Test series against New Zealand. Surely he will be selected.

"Hopefully I'll be back there," he says. "I've been playing the last two years now (for England). My brothers and I meet up quite a lot with the English lads when they're over here playing for clubs and the England coach (Steve McNamara) is on the staff at the Roosters, so there's a strong English presence in the NRL."

"We've got three games against the Kiwis at the end of the year, so I'll be going over to England if everything goes to plan. I'll stay there for a couple of weeks after that because I've got a mate's wedding, and I'll be back here for Christmas I think."

Right in the middle of an Australian summer. It couldn't go to plan any better for the big fellow, but what the long-term future holds remains up in the air. Burgess has enjoyed where life has taken him so far and is looking forward to where it may still take him. **RLW**

Which rule really sucks?

When *RLW* asked a bunch of top-line players to name one rule in the game they'd like to change, we got a few surprising answers!

BY STEVE MASCORD

"THAT'S A *REALLY* good question," says James Graham, late one Friday night after a Canterbury match at Homebush.

"It's a tough one. What have people been saying? Um, yeah, I don't want to waste this.

"What about 'no rules'? Huh! Just go out and play. Do whatever. No rules at all.

"Nah, I'll think of something. Get back to me."

Rule changes are the issue *du jour* in rugby league, with many people up in arms – no pun intended – about the recent shoulder charge edict.

Should any rule interpretations change mid-season? Should the players have a say? We asked a host of NRL and Super League stars what rules they hated, and what changes they would make if they could.

We never did get the British Bulldog's answer. Ask him if you see him around.

We'd also love to hear what you, the punters, have to say – so Tweet us your rule change @Leagueweek and #myrulechange.

Now, over to the stars...

RULE CHANGE: STRIPPING

TERRY CAMPESE (Hull KR)

Campo reckons just touching the ball in a tackle doesn't make the defender guilty of being a dirty stripper.

"The strip," he answered quickly when we put our query to him. "Some of them, you're in contact where you're trying to wrap the ball up and you touch it and they call it a strip. They've got to put more onus on the guy carrying the ball."

This was an issue when David Shillington was sent off in round 22 for a head-butt. He'd dropped the ball. Rival Robbie Farah admitted he had a hand on the Steeden in the tackle, arguing that Shillington is "a compulsive offloader" and should expect nothing less.



RULE CHANGE: BALL STEALING

JARROD CROKER (Raiders)

What gives 'Toots' the poo-poops during a football game?

"Most things give me the shits, mate. Ball stripping... I've seen them go to the scrum, looking at the big screen and blow a penalty. So, there's a bit of inconsistency there. That's only me saying that as well, because it cost us some momentum in games. I don't watch a heap of footy." But all he really wants is regularity in officiating.

"Just a bit of consistency all-round," he continues. "There's been a bit of talk of the captain's challenge. I'll admit I'm probably not a fan of that. It just slows the game down too much, I reckon. The obstruction one still gets thrown around a lot. It's not so much the rules, it's consistency." We hear you, brother.



RULE CHANGE: DIVING

DENE HALATAU (Tigers)

The NRL were backed into a corner earlier this season by a spate of players staying on the ground, bringing in the video referee and giving their teammates a spell. Now, the video referee can only intervene over a high tackle if the incident is likely to result in a judiciary charge. Diving has taken a dive but old hand Dene Halatau reckons it's still an issue. "Staying on the ground, yeah," he says. "You don't want it to turn into soccer, eh? You don't like seeing someone get hit illegally – but if they bounce back up, you also feel like they're doing something tough by getting up. They're not trying to milk a penalty. But if someone is injured, you don't want them to get up unnecessarily."



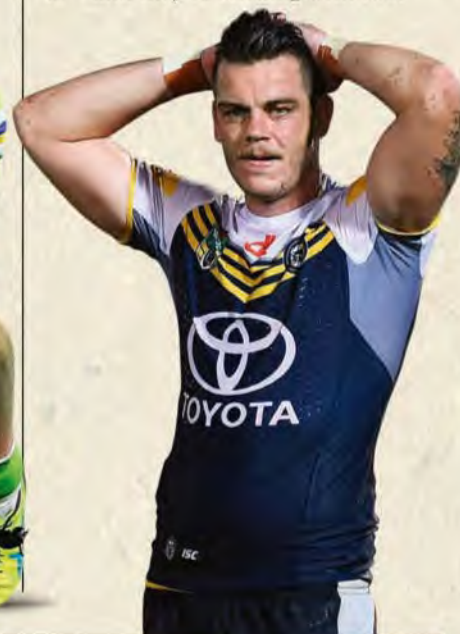
RULE CHANGE: NUMBER OF REFEREES

ETHAN LOWE (Cowboys)

The sole referee was a big hit with NRL fans during the representative weekend this year – but that doesn't mean it's coming back. Some players, however, would like it to.

"I get a bit annoyed with the two referee thing," Ethan Lowe says.

"One is telling you to move, the other one is telling you you've got more time. That's a bit frustrating. You don't know who to listen to. But it's up to people above me to make those sorts of decisions." It certainly is – and they're sticking with two.





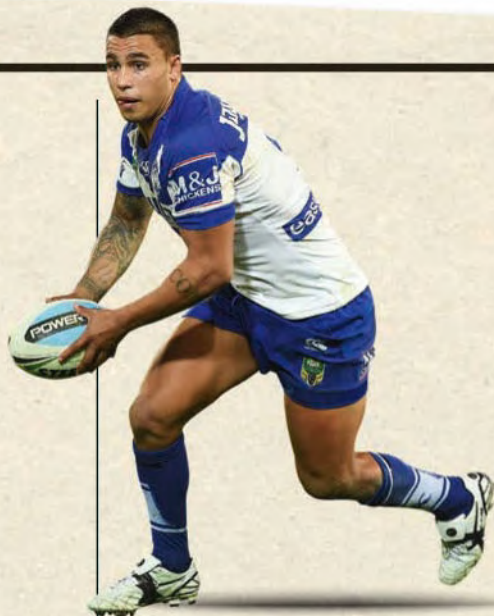
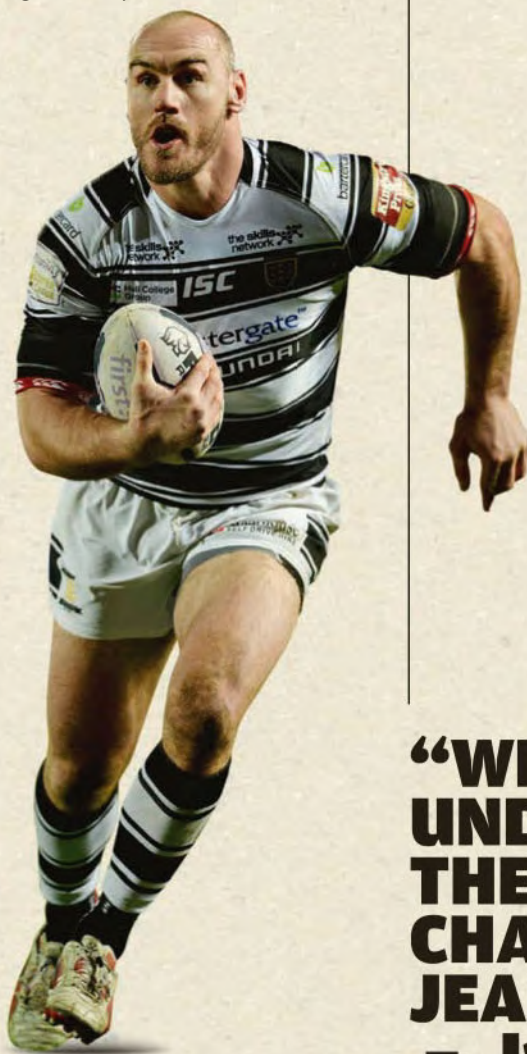
RULE CHANGE: THE PLAY-THE-BALL

GARETH ELLIS (Hull FC)

Gaz Ellis is an old-school rugby league man. His pet peeve is based on principles and etiquette.

"You know what really gripes me? People not playing the ball properly. That's what defines our game, between rugby league and rugby union – the play-the-ball. So it's a skill we should learn properly.

"I don't mind if there's an attempt but if it's just thrown back, it gets on my nerves a little bit."



RULE CHANGE: SEVEN TACKLES

MICHAEL LICHAA (Bulldogs)

Other players are less idealistic in the rules they would change. They want life to be made a little easier for them – and having to tackle for longer after kicking the ball dead is not, in any way, Michael Lichaa's cup of tea.

"Seven tackles – it's a killer – when the ball goes dead. Sometimes it just goes dead and they get seven. I think the people who made that rule up aren't out there playing the game, because it's already fast enough. When you've got the ball and you get the seven tackles, it's nice. But . . . it sucks when you've got to run back there and 'D' up."

**"WHEN I SEE THE
UNDER-20s DO
THEIR CAPTAIN'S
CHALLENGE, I GET
JEALOUS"**
– Jason Nightingale

RULE CHANGE: PLAY-THE-BALL AND OFFSIDE

JAKE MARKETO (Dragons)

And then there are the men such as Jake Marketo who would use their magic wand to stop the refs penalising them. Just their team, do what you like to the rest . . .

"I hate when we get penalised for off-side, late in a set. You've busted your backside for four or five tackles and then that happens coming out of yardage.

That's hard to cop.

"You can't change that one. You've just got to play by the rules, I suppose."



RULE CHANGE: CAPTAIN'S CALL

JASON NIGHTINGALE (Dragons)

Likewise, the Dragons winger wants a captain's challenge – but only when he's captain. "When I'm captain, I'd like a captain's challenge.

When I see the Under-20s do it, I get jealous. I always think I'm right!

"I would have got Dylan Farrell a try when we played the Roosters on Anzac Day.

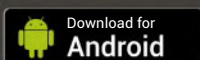
"I'd put in a captain's challenge . . . just for selfish reasons. It's me thinking I know everything and wanting to try and change the ref's decision."



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FROM
1PM
EVERY
GAME DAY

ICE: A GRY FOR HELP

Crystal meth isn't just a drug for the streets. As **ROBERT BURGIN** discovers in this *RLW* investigation, the insidious drug is also infecting rural rugby league communities

A COUNTRY RUGBY league president has sensationally threatened to dob in any players caught using the drug ice, saying he doesn't care if his club "comes dead last for years".

In a sign of desperation over what he calls a "cancer" for rural towns, Moree Boars boss Todd Mitchell is taking a hard-line stance.

Now he's calling on the NRL, CRL and fellow bush clubs to follow suit and present a unified front on the methamphetamine scourge.

"There are clubs here in Group 19 where half the squad is on the stuff," an exasperated Mitchell says.

"The biggest problem is that the younger blokes in footy always look up to the senior players, but it's these older ones who'll deal it to fund their own habit.

"There's a known drug dealer in this competition who's a pretty good footballer and it sickens me to see

kids calling out his name and giving him high fives, hanging off him like he's a god.

"I'm not saying our blokes are angels . . . and I certainly have my suspicions.

"There are ones that are always hitting you up for money, suddenly getting skinny, even though they don't do any fitness."

So serious is Mitchell about the issue, he says he has personally phoned ASADA to request they travel out and test his own squad.

However, he has been told that the funding is not available to make it a reality.

"I don't want players at my club if they're on it, simple," says Mitchell.

"It's a cancer that eats away at a place and if it meant we came dead last for years so we got rid of it completely, I wouldn't care.

"The Country Rugby League came out previously and ran a great program about tackling domestic

violence, which I felt made a real difference. It was a top initiative.

"But this ice is the biggest problem now facing us."

Three hours north on the Carnarvon Highway, across the border in Queensland, rabid rugby league supporter Neale O'Brien fears the situation is almost identical.

O'Brien runs the Toyota dealership in St George and has invested most of his life into sponsoring or running bush football clubs.

He's also vice-chairman of Queensland's Southern Division chapter of the Men of League Foundation, which assists those in need.

"Ice is everywhere out here. It's a huge problem," O'Brien says.

"You go up to any young kid and ask them who has it and they'll say 'Who hasn't?'

"It's destroying lives. We've had enough. The community is rallying for the fight of our generation."



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Last year St George were named the Queensland Rugby League Club of the Year. This year they have found it much tougher going, even having to forfeit in reserve grade several times.

O'Brien says the combination of an extended drought and the influx of ice has had a crippling effect.

"In the cities people use drugs to party, but out here it has become the source of solace for people going through tough times," he explains.

"The truck drivers or families on the land are using it at home, in front of their kids.

"And the police are totally under-resourced and disheartened by the legal system.

"If you had to arrest 20 fellas at once, all using ice, go to the station and fill in the paperwork, then come back and arrest the same 20 and do it all again a few weeks later, you'd probably feel the same."

Ice is the purest form of methamphetamine available in



Australia, with a concentration multiple times that of what is known as speed.

Also called meth, crystal meth or shabu, it's a stimulant usually seen as colourless or white crystals or a coarse powder.

Long-term effects of ice use include dependence, agitation, decreased memory and concentration, low immunity, depression, psychosis and resulting financial, work, legal and relationship problems.

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research shows that, aside from tourist hotspot Byron Bay, it's far-flung outposts such as Moree, Bourke, Deniliquin and Wakool that have the highest rates of drug offences per capita.

Narrandera, positioned between Wagga Wagga and Griffith at the intersection of two highways, actually has the second-highest per capita rate in the state.

'There's a known drug dealer in this competition who's a pretty good footballer and it sickens me to see kids calling out his name and giving him high fives, hanging off him like he's a god'

The town of 4000 was recently featured in *The Australian* newspaper, where a former junior rugby league player known only as Billy told his tale of addiction.

Spending every cent of his dole

payments on ice, Billy reflected on a missed ambition to follow in the footsteps of the town's hero, Manly legend Cliff Lyons.

"I hate hearin' it . . . how good a player he was," Billy's girlfriend said.

"It was a wasted opportunity."

At the other end of the nation, in Far North Queensland, Mick Nasser is worried the same story will repeat for local children around Atherton.

Publican at the Barron Valley Hotel, Nasser is famed in rugby league circles as the man who helped steer Todd Carney back on the right path for a second coming in the NRL.

He says he has no knowledge or inclination that ice is a problem with Atherton's current football squad, but says its presence in the community is widespread and still presents the sport with a threat.

"It's hard enough to get kids into football as it is," he says.

"Once they touch that ice stuff, they're screwed. They can't physically do anything.

"You take a small town like Atherton and rule out three or four kids who could play, and that's the difference between fielding a team or not.

"I say people have got to dob dealers into the cops. Go hard at it."

Two weeks ago a public forum discussing ice in Atherton drew 300 people midweek.

Among those presenting were parents who had lost ice-addicted children to suicide.

"The general feeling is that the poor buggers who are addicted to it, they need our help," Nasser says.

"But the dealers need locking up good and proper. Magistrates need to stop being lenient on them.

"It's not like weed or speed. It's highly addictive, and as someone that works in hospitality, you've got to look out for people that are tanked on it.

"The sooner the government weighs in and gets tough, the better."

Back in Moree, Todd Mitchell is preparing for the typical end-of-season and off-season period, where even the most disciplined players let their moral compass wander.

Away from the eastern seafloor, Mad Monday shenanigans aren't reported with glossy photos in the gossip pages.

In the bush, if some local footy players aren't in the sports section, they're more likely to be mentioned in the crime or casualty columns.

"Boredom is such a factor out here and makes it tough to keep guys away from temptation," Mitchell says.

"Buying ice is cheaper than a carton of grog and it keeps them going without sleep for three days.

"It's not isolated to one area and it's not isolated to rugby league.

"It has cut its way right through Australia.

"But I'd like the CRL and NRL to play a part in doing something about it."

FROM WYONG T

Former Knight Josh Mantellato could easily have been studying for uni exams this weekend – instead he will be tested on the game's biggest stage

BY PHIL WILKINSON

IF EVERYTHING HAD GONE gone to script, Josh Mantellato would be playing for Wyong this weekend.

He'd spend this week studying to be a maths teacher, maybe earn a bit of coin with a few shifts as a personal trainer, before taking on Wentworthville in this Saturday's NSW Cup clash.

Instead, he's weighing up the prospect of playing in front of nearly 80,000 fans – and a global TV audience – in a Challenge Cup final at Wembley.

"I don't know how to explain it," he tells *RLW*. "When I came over here I certainly didn't expect to make the Challenge Cup final in my first year. It's something special.

"It's been a bit of a rollercoaster, I guess."

Hull KR have been on a high ever since knocking out Warrington in the semi-final to secure their first final spot in 29 years.

"Everyone is buzzing," enthuses club director Phil Lowe, the former Great Britain and Manly forward who has been involved with Hull KR for 50 years, making his Robins debut as a 17-year-old in 1967.

"The Challenge Cup is a magical competition, and to get to Wembley . . . it's incredible."

Hull KR – a long-time mid-table Super League side – aren't even guaranteed a place in the top-flight next year. They are fighting for their future through the new Super 8s phase of the season – and yet they stand just 80 minutes away from winning their first Challenge Cup since 1980.

It's a fairytale embodied by Mantellato's journey.

This was the bloke, remember, who only made his NRL debut at the advanced age of 26.

"When I was 21, rugby league wasn't everything to me. I didn't start realising I was all right at it until I was 23, 24," he says.

So he turned up at the Knights' reserve-grade training, worked hard and earned a place in their NSW Cup squad.

After two NRL appearances, he slipped down the pecking order last year, and began considering a return to old club Wyong – and enrolling at university – when a phone call from the other side of the world changed his career plans.

"All I wanted to do was play an NRL game – that was the goal – and I was lucky enough to do that," the 28-year-old says. "Last year, the Knights blooded a lot of talented outside backs and, mate, they were killing it in first grade.

"I realised I wouldn't be there long. I sort of decided I was going to study to be a maths teacher, and was going to go back to Wyong and play there."

Enter Hull KR.

Coach Chris Chester had noticed the towering winger kick a winning



"I certainly didn't expect to make the Challenge Cup final in my first year. It's something special"



PEACOCK PLANS TO BEAT THEM – THEN JOIN THEM

JAMIE PEACOCK IS AIMING TO WRECK Hull KR's Wembley dream – just weeks before he joins the Robins.

The 37-year-old prop is quitting Leeds at the end of the season to take a football manager role with their Super League rivals.

The Rhinos are on course for a domestic treble of trophies, including the minor premiership, and the ex-England captain says it would be a dream to finish his playing career with a clean sweep.

TO WEMBLEY



field goal for Italy in a World Cup warm-up game against England in 2013, tracked his progress, and – after receiving a glowing reference from former Hull KR player Clint Newton – offered him a deal.

Having enjoyed his stint in the UK during the international tournament with the Italian squad – “the crowds were so vocal, and I got to play with Anthony Minichiello” – he didn’t need much persuading.

Mantellato has become a firm favourite in the UK, scoring 23 tries and booting 103 goals in 27 matches heading into last weekend.

But any success he has enjoyed so far is dwarfed by the prospect of playing against Leeds at one of the world’s most iconic venues.

“When we won the semi, you wanted to see the English boys in the sheds . . . it was disbelief and excitement,” he says. “If you’re playing at Wembley, no matter what it is, you know it’s something special. The name itself has got that aura about it.”

“I spoke to Danny Buderus, who played in a final with Leeds, and he said it’s something else.”

Hull KR will become the ninth different finalist in the Challenge Cup since it returned to spiritual home Wembley in 2007.

By contrast, the Super League grand final has had just four teams in the same time frame.

Their sole success in the sport’s oldest tournament was back in 1980, when they beat fierce rivals Hull FC. “And people still talk about it now,” says Lowe, who starred that day. “Hopefully they can beat Leeds. It won’t be easy – but they seem to play better when

they’re frightened of getting a good hiding.”

Hull KR are taking an estimated 30,000 fans with them to London, and even though they have beaten Wigan, Catalans and Warrington to qualify for the final, they are the rank outsiders. It’s no coincidence that when they got a chance to record a special song with ’80s pop act Erasure to mark the occasion, they chose their signature hit: *A Little Respect*.

“Across the park, there are no weaknesses in Leeds’ side,” says Mantellato, whose girlfriend Alex, brother Nathan and parents, Joe and Tracy, are flying to England for the game. “Ryan Hall is a monster, Zak Hardaker has been killing it . . . they are really dangerous, and used to these big matches, too.”

“People might not expect too much from us, so we’re not feeling under pressure. Sometimes it’s good being the underdog.”

Hull KR, nicknamed the Robins, lost captain Terry Campese to a season-ending knee injury in mid-season and head into the final sweating over the fitness of Albert Kelly, the former Titans halfback who has also proved a huge hit in Super League.

“He’s the only half in the comp who puts every kilo of his body in front of blokes,” Mantellato adds. “It would be a huge plus if he’s fit.”

Former NRL players Tony Puletua, Ken Sio, Maurice Blair, Mitch Allgood, Dane Tilse and Dane Chisholm are also part of the Hull KR squad. **RLW**

● *The Challenge Cup final will be screened live on Fox Sports 1 from midnight this Saturday (AEST).*

“If we nail the performance and win, it’ll be the dream finish,” he tells *RLW*. “I know me playing against Hull KR is a good storyline for everyone, but I’ve been involved with them quite a bit this year (ahead of his new role), so it’s been a bit awkward for me.

“But Wembley week is all about business, and if we go there with our six-out-of-10 game, we’ll get beat.

“Every dog has its day and we’ve seen with Hull KR, they’ve beaten Warrington,

Wigan and Catalans to get to the final, so we have to take them seriously.”

Peacock has been in sterling form during his swansong campaign, but has no regrets about calling time on his decorated career.

“I think when you see me on the pitch, you see the good side,” he says.

“My best two days of the week are the team run, and the game the following day. But then I spend five days of the week shuffling about, pissed off because I’m sore everywhere and I can’t recover! I wanted to

bow out at the top, and I think I’ve achieved that, and not many players get to do that at this age.”

Leeds, top of the Super League ladder, won the Challenge Cup last year and head into the final as hot favourites after an outstanding campaign. Their squad includes ex-NRL players Adam Cuthbertson, Joel Moon and Mitch Garbutt, as well as English stars Ryan Hall, Zak Hardaker, Kallum Watkins, Rob Burrow and Kevin Sinfield.

PHIL WILKINSON

FAR&WIDE SUPER BUILD-UP TO USA’S BIG GAME

Atlanta and Boston to meet in American GF . . . but they’ll need to remain patient

BY STEVE MASCORD

LIKE THE SUPER BOWL, American rugby league’s National Championship game has a two-week lead-in time.

This year the Atlanta Rhinos – an expansion team formed to give the previously invincible Jacksonville Axemen some competition – will meet the Boston 13s at Hodges Stadium in Jacksonville this Saturday, August 29.

Boston beat Philadelphia 20-12 to win the north division while Atlanta scored a 32-28 win over Central Florida in the south conference.

LEEDS COACH BRIAN McDERMOTT will have his first assignment as United States boss when the newly renamed Hawks host Jamaica and Canada for World Cup qualifiers in December.

Three games will be played over eight days in Florida from December 4.

Hodges Stadium gets two games involving the US. Spec Martin Stadium in DeLand gets the Jamaica-Canada match on December 8.

STILL IN NORTH AMERICA, THE British Columbia Bulldogs recently scored an upset win over a touring British team.

Second-rower Hashem Mirlohi scored two tries in the 18-16 boilover against BARLA Young Lions in North Vancouver.

FINALLY, CONGRATULATIONS TO Bridgend Blue Bulls for their 34-30 win over Aber Valley Wolves in the Welsh grand final.

And also to the Ukraine and Serbia, who recently split a tightly contested two-game Under-18s series.

MAD MONDAY!

It's a funny old game, rugby league. And *RLW* wants to celebrate all the characters and colour that make it great

MR PERSONALITY: JACKSON HASTINGS

The second generation Rooster discusses everything from his famous old man's mo and his new pet dog's love of a coffee **BY GREG PRICHARD**



Your dad Kevin was, of course, a Roosters star in the 1970s and '80s and is one of the best players never to play for Australia. Have you seen much of him playing on film?

I haven't seen much of him playing full games. I've seen highlights and the way he used to defend and make try-saving tackles and have that never-say-die attitude. Plenty of good moments.

Has he been an influence on you in terms of your style of play?

Because he was living in the US, he didn't really see me play too much growing up, but he would always ring me before the game and give me little tips and pointers. Yeah, he's been really good.

So are you two pretty close?

Yeah, we are close, without being over the top. We're not your usual father and son, lovey-dovey sort of thing, we're more good mates.

You've actually got the old Kevin Hastings-style moustache happening. How long has that been in existence?

(Laughs). It's been there ever since I could grow facial hair, so it's been a while. I've got to have something of Dad's, I look like my mum in many ways. Mum says I look like her and I've got Dad's personality (laughs).

Is there much of his game in your game?

You know what, I think there is,

attitude-wise. Never give up, try to play as tough as you can and be in the opposition's face. I think those parts are in my game. I'm definitely a different build – a lot taller, probably a bit faster – to be fair to the old man. There are definitely similar traits in terms of attitude, but I think playing-wise we're a bit different.

What do you do in your time off from footy?

I used to just chill at home and not do much, but I bought a dog recently – a Cavoodle, a cross between a Cavalier and a Poodle – and he's got a lot of energy, so he keeps me on my toes. I take him down the park and he loves coming to have a coffee with me as well.

He doesn't drink it, does he?

(Laughs). No – he's just there for the social aspect, I think.

Are you living in the eastern suburbs?

Yeah, I live with a housemate at Coogee. I grew up living at Warilla Beach on the South Coast, so I love the beach life. I used to do surf club and all that sort of stuff until I had to make a choice with footy. I've got really pasty skin, so I've got to be careful about sunburn, but I like going in the water.

Are you a factor 30 or even 50 man?

(Laughs). Definitely 50. I really have to whack it on. Zinc cream, as well, at training in the pre-season.

What's on your iPod? Who do you like, musically?

I like the 'gangsta' sort of music – it gets me going for the day. I like to jump in the car to go to training and turn it up loud. I like Chris Brown. I'm a big JB fan, to be honest – Justin Bieber. He's come a long way, so I don't mind him.

Is there anything on TV you must watch every week?

I like *The Voice*. I'm on Team Ricky this year. I like the team he's got, so hopefully one of them takes it out.

What's your own voice like?

No, horrible. I've got a shower voice at home, that's it. I wouldn't be game to try singing around the boys.

If you had unlimited cash and time, where would you go in the world for a holiday, or a big event you would really love to see?

I'd love to see Ronda Rousey fight live one day, and I wouldn't mind living in America, to be honest. I'm big on American sport and I'm big on Ronda Rousey, too – I think she's a great fighter.

You wouldn't want to be late for the fight – they're normally over in about 15 seconds!

(Laughs). Yeah, you're right there. She's pretty good. **RLW**

A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF RUGBY LEAGUE RHYMING SLANG

Barry Beath / (noun)
teeth – “Lucky I had my
mouthguard in, otherwise
I would have lost a few Barry
Beath.”

Meat pie / (noun) a try
– “I need to grab a meat pie
today, otherwise I’ll be forced
to do a nudie run.”

A Les Kiss / (noun) an
alternative term for taking a
leak – “I just sunk about 10
schooners and now I’m
busting for a Les Kiss.”

The Johnny Raper /
(noun) the newspaper – “Why
buy the Johnny Raper when
you could buy *RLW* instead?”

Ronny Coote / (noun)
beaut – “You little Ronny
Coote!”

Ronny Coote / (noun)
an alternative term for having
intimate time with a loved one
– “On our wedding night,
I’m really looking forward to a
Ronny Coote!”

Craig Gower / (noun) a
shower – “I’m pretty dirty
after playing in that North
Sydney Oval mudbowl, so
I need a Craig Gower.”

Tulsen Tollett / (noun)
a wallet – “Wow, this barbell
is heavier than Nick Politis’
Tulsen Tollett.”

Johnny Peard / (noun)
a beard – “Gee, that Blake
Austin has an impressive
Johnny Peard.”

Marshall Chalk /
(noun) walk – “It’s such a nice
day, I think I’ll go for a quick
Marshall Chalk.”

Chris Caruana /
(noun) marijuana – “I’m
feeling tense, I might relax
with a puff of Chris Caruana.”

STEVEN RUSSO

MAD STUFF ON EBAY!



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Show your little tyke is
one to watch with this
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With this jersey on
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stand up and take
notice. Bidding starts
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as you get out of bed.
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ITEM NUMBER
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LOOK WHO WE FOUND!

RASPUTIN (AKA JON ENGLISH)

WHEN ERIC GROTHE
Snr was suffering a crisis
of confidence in late 1987,
rather than consult a
sports psychologist, the
blockbusting winger decided to see a
mystic healer. Well, sort of.

Grothe went to Australian
entertainer Jon English, who at the
time was playing the mystical Russian
faith healer Rasputin in the stage
show of the same name.

RLW tagged along and snapped
Rasputin and the Guru together at
Sydney’s majestic State Theatre,
providing the magazine with one of
our more memorable covers.

“Rasputin was a mad monk
who got himself into the Tsar and
Tsarina’s good books because he said
he could stop their haemophiliac
son from bleeding to death,” English
explains. “I think Eric was going
through a bit of a form slump – by
his standards, of course, which is not
really a form slump by anyone else’s

standards. The main angle of the
story was that in the show I had a line
about the importance of believing in
yourself. They wrote the story about
how Eric was quite spiritual . . . and
we posed together for a photo.”

When it comes to footy, English, 66,
is no *Jonny come lately*. A dyed-in-
the-wool Eels fan, he was introduced
to the game when his family settled in
Sydney’s western suburbs during the
early 1960s.

“I came out to Australia when
I was 12, and I went to school in
Cabramatta,” the British expat says.

“They asked me what sport
I played in England and when I said
football (meaning soccer) they threw
me this rugby ball. I ended up playing
second row and inside-centre for the
school. Being a Parramatta junior
I used to go down and watch the Eels
play down at Cumberland Oval.”

In 1986, English put his passion into
practice by recording the Eels’ theme
song *Parra Power To Win* to coincide

with the opening of Parramatta
Stadium. Then 25 years later, he and
Grothe were reunited, and along with
their respective sons Eric Jnr and
Jon Jnr collaborated on a revamped
version of the Eels’ anthem.

After watching father and son in
action, English says he was impressed
by how both Erics handled their axes.

“Eric’s quite a good guitar player
. . . his son’s really good, actually,”
English says. “I think through both
their lives they’ve been caught
between this dilemma of ‘Do I want to
be a musician or a football player?’”

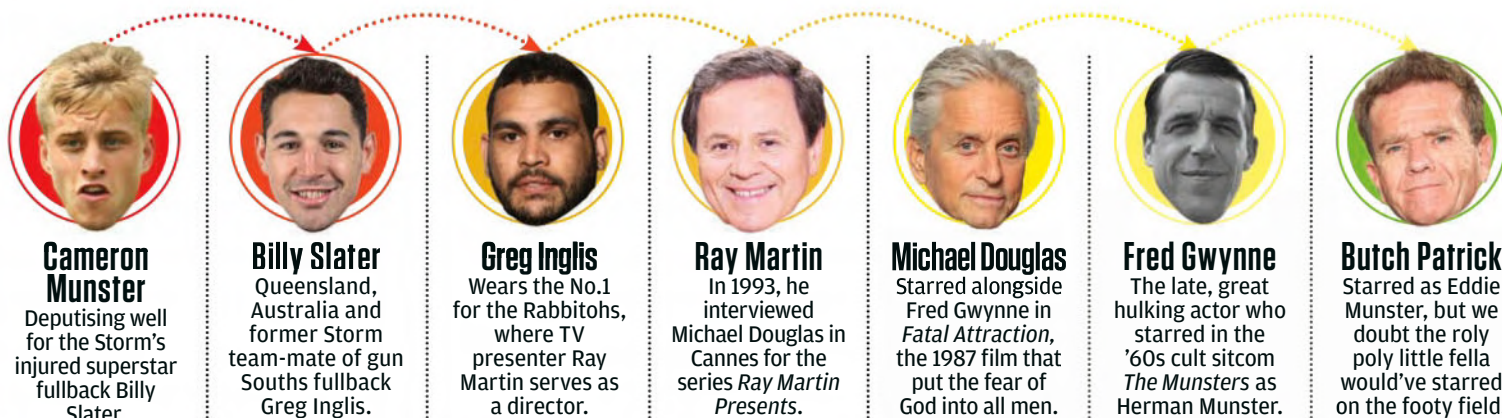
Now based in Coffs Harbour,
English doesn’t get out to Pirtek
Stadium to watch his Eels as often
as he would like, but he’s clearly still
passionate about the club.

“They’ve got to get it right at the
top,” he says. “I know we’ve had a lot
of injuries, but how we can actually
break a salary cap at the same time
. . . I can’t really understand it.”

STEVEN RUSSO

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Cameron Munster to Eddie Munster



PREGAME

ROUND 25

POWERED BY



With two rounds to go and everything to play for, *RLW* has all the stats, facts and figures you need to know!



THE BIG GAME!

WE CAN STILL WIN THE COMPETITION!

Forget squeezing into the top eight, Manly have their eyes on the ultimate prize **BY JOEL GOULD**

THEY INTEND TO GO where only Eagles dare.

No side in the NRL era has been last after 16 rounds – as Manly was this season – and gone on to reach the top eight.

But no side loves a good backs-to-the-wall siege mentality quite like the Brookvale club, and the Sea Eagles are more likely than any to defy that history.

Manly have made the finals for the past 10 seasons and relish the challenge facing them. Wins against the Roosters at Brookvale Oval this Friday night and the Sharks away in the final round are musts to have any chance of making the semis.

But assistant coach Dave Penna says a ninth premiership remains the goal. The squad marked themselves hard after the round 19 loss to the Cowboys at Brookvale and made a commitment to each other before travelling to New Zealand the following week.

“We knew we were in a tough position but the coaching staff and players all got together and we spoke about what we were capable of achieving if we all stuck together and worked hard,” Penna says.

Four weeks after that win, the Sea Eagles are still alive and kicking in the finals race.

“If we can get there in that first week of September, and are fully fit, then we can win the competition,” Penna insists.

“That’s also how the other coaches and support staff feel, and I know the players feel the same way.”

Off-contract veteran prop Willie Mason has missed the past two games for a shoulder charge but is ready to take on his old club at Brookvale this Friday.

Penna believes the 35-year-old is saving his best until last.

“We have missed him these past weeks, but we’re glad he’s about to play again because he’s been

bouncing around at training and driving everybody mad,” he laughs.

Penna has been at the club for 10 years in a variety of roles and has played a key part in Manly’s success as an assistant coach for the past four seasons. But he, like head coach Geoff Toovey, won’t be at Brookvale next year – and Mason has helped him get through this tough time.

In fact, Big Willie’s upbeat ways have played a key role in getting the whole group through a difficult year.

“I have never been through the hard times that we have as coaches this year,” Penna says.

“Geoff was told (of his sacking) three weeks ago, and I was told the next day . . . but there was no point walking around kicking stones.

“It was tough because I have seen a lot of these boys grow from 17-year-old young men into terrific adults and terrific footballers. We have worked hard with a lot of these players and we will have to say goodbye to a lot of people. But Willie has been fantastic for me, personally. He has been through some tough times himself, but he always comes out the other end with a positive attitude.

“That rubs off on everybody.”

Since 1995, Manly have lost to the Roosters at Brookvale just three times (2003, ’04 and ’13), and their overall record of 81 wins, 43 losses and two draws against the Tricolours is the envy of every other club in the NRL. No other side is close to matching that win-loss ratio against the Chooks.

“Kieran Foran and Mitchell Pearce grew up together and are good mates and they always bring the best out of one another,” Penna says.

“Young Jared Waerea-Hargreaves is a friend of mine and a young bloke we used to coach here who’s having an outstanding season. It’s friends playing friends and it’s one of those rivalries, especially since the 2013 grand final, that the players pride themselves on playing well in.”



THURSDAY, AUGUST 27, 7.45PM

Rabbitohs v Broncos Allianz Stadium

HISTORY: Played 31, Broncos 21, Rabbitohs 9, drawn 1.

THIS GROUND: Played 9, Broncos 7, Rabbitohs 1, drawn 1.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Rabbitohs 36 bt Broncos 6 at Suncorp Stadium, rd1, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

- 4** Consecutive wins by South Sydney over the Broncos.
- 6** Tries by Rabbitohs fullback Greg Inglis (right) from his past four games against Brisbane.
- 6** Straight losses for Wayne Bennett coaching against the Rabbitohs.
- 6** Wins by Souths from their past seven Thursday night games – their only loss in that timeslot was a 22-18 tune-up from the Roosters in Rd 26 last year.

UBET RABBITOHS \$1.70
BRONCOS \$2.15



FRIDAY, AUGUST 28, 7.45PM

Sea Eagles v Roosters Brookvale Oval

HISTORY: Played 126, Sea Eagles 81, Roosters 43, drawn 2.

THIS GROUND: Played 47, Sea Eagles 35, Roosters 12.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Sea Eagles 24 bt Roosters 16 at Brookvale Oval, rd16, 2014.

MAGIC NUMBERS

- 7** Wins by Manly from their past eight games against the Roosters at Brookvale.
- 2** Wins by the Sea Eagles from their past 10 Friday night games.
- 5** Losses for Roosters centre Blake Ferguson from five games at Brookvale.
- 5** Consecutive wins by the Roosters away from Allianz Stadium.

UBET SEA EAGLES \$2.15
ROOSTERS \$1.70



SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 3PM

Eels v Sharks Pirtek Stadium

HISTORY: Played 80, Sharks 41, Eels 39.

THIS GROUND: Played 23, Sharks 12, Eels 11.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Eels 32 bt Sharks 12 at Remondis Stadium, rd21, 2014.

MAGIC NUMBERS

- 4** Wins by Parramatta from their past five games against Cronulla.
- 1** Solitary win by the Eels from their past five games at Pirtek Stadium.
- 21** Tries by Eels winger Semi Radradra from 17 games at Pirtek Stadium.
- 5** Wins by the Sharks from their past six games away from home.

UBET EELS \$2.45
SHARKS \$1.55



SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 5.30PM

Knights v Bulldogs Hunter Stadium

HISTORY: Played 41, Knights 20, Bulldogs 20, drawn 1.

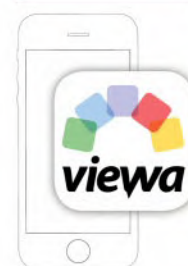
THIS GROUND: Played 18, Knights 12, Bulldogs 6.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Bulldogs 16 bt Knights 12 at ANZ Stadium, rd8, 2014.

MAGIC NUMBERS

- 6** Wins by Newcastle from their last nine clashes against Canterbury.
- 3** Wins by the Knights (and a draw) from their past five five-day turnarounds.
- 2** Wins by the Knights from their past nine games at Hunter Stadium.
- 58** Tries by Knights winger Akuila Uate from 74 games at Hunter Stadium.

UBET KNIGHTS \$3.70
BULLDOGS \$1.28

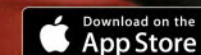


Scan this page for video highlights of the classic 1972 grand final between Manly and Easts

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MY PREGAME ROUTINE

Before **Josh Papalii** goes out and rattles a few cages he needs a lot of sleep, a big feed and a bit of mischief

SUNDAY

We'll have a captain's run in the morning, followed by a quick recovery session. After training I'll go for a feed with whoever's available, usually to the Sushi Train or Grill'd at Belconnen Mall. If I go to Grill'd, I will always grab a 'Baa Baa' (lamb) burger, with chips on the side. After that, my missus and I may go to a church over in Charnwood – either that or we'll just relax at home and play around with my 11-month daughter, Khalani-Rose. Dinner the night before game day is a chicken schnitzel with chips, which is cooked by the missus. Bedtime is whenever – if I fall asleep at 11pm, I fall asleep at 11pm. If I fall asleep at 2am, I fall asleep at 2am.

GAME DAY

On game day I try and get up as late as possible – I'm a big sleeper! I'll usually have brekky around 11.30am. I'll have an egg and bacon sandwich at home or drive out with the family to this place Blake Austin showed us called Kingston & Co at Belconnen Mall. I might also head over to the Coffee Club for a quick coffee.

2PM

I just want to have a bit of quiet time at this stage. Usually the missus and I will take the little one down to the park and have a little chat. After that I'll go back home and watch a movie before having a sleep. Because I've had a massive brekky, I'll usually have a really small lunch.

4.45PM

Edrick Lee lives pretty close by to my place, so I'll catch a ride with him to GIO Stadium at about 4.45pm. I'll have some fruit as soon as I walk into the sheds – strictly rockmelon. Then I'll walk over to my locker, get undressed and immediately get strapped. Recently I've been getting my knee strapped to address a small injury I've been carrying. After my strapping is

done, I'll walk around the room trying to wreck everyone's pre-game routine (laughs).

6PM

About an hour before kick-off Sia Soliola takes Frank-Paul Nuuausala, Sisa Waqa and myself into a separate room for a quick prayer with Father John Woods – he shares a few scriptures from the bible and prays for us. About half an hour before kick-off we do our warm-up. Before we run out, I'll have a quick prayer before listening to our skipper Jarrod Croker give his last message.

9PM

Not much happens after the game. We walk around the ground thanking the fans before coming back in for recovery. We're supposed to have an ice bath but I'm never in it – I don't like it. We have promos after some home games which involve signing sessions with the fans, but if that's not on, we usually just get dressed and go to one of the boys' houses for a hang out. I've been going to Austo's (Blake Austin) house a lot lately because he doesn't mind a chat. We usually just sit there and watch our kids play.

MIDNIGHT

Bed time after a game is either really late at night or really early in the morning. There have been a couple of times where I haven't fallen asleep until 4am. When I can't sleep I'll just watch a movie or sit up and talk to the wife.

AS TOLD TO STEVEN RUSSO

"AS SOON AS I GET TO THE SHEDS I'LL WALK OVER TO MY LOCKER, GET UNDRESSED AND GET STRAPPED. THEN I'LL WALK AROUND THE ROOM TRYING TO WRECK EVERYONE'S PRE-GAME ROUTINE!"





SATURDAY, AUGUST 29, 7.30PM

Storm v Cowboys

AAMI Park

HISTORY: Played 28, Storm 19, Cowboys 9.
THIS GROUND: Played 2, Storm 1, Cowboys 1.
LAST TIME THEY MET: Cowboys 18 bt Storm 17 at 1300Smiles Stadium, rd 4, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

4 Wins by the Cowboys from their past six games against the Storm. But they have only won one of their past eight in Melbourne.

7 Games in Melbourne for North Queensland front-rower Ben Hannant (*left*) for seven losses.

2 Wins by Cowboys coach Paul Green from two games coaching against Craig Bellamy.

2 Wins by the Storm from their past seven five-day turnarounds.

UBET STORM \$1.90
COWBOYS \$1.90



SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2PM

Tigers v Warriors

Campbelltown Stadium

HISTORY: Played 24, Warriors 13, Tigers 11.

THIS GROUND: Played 4, Tigers 2, Warriors 2.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Warriors 32 bt Tigers 22 at Mt Smart Stadium, rd 6, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

98 Points scored by the Warriors from three consecutive wins against Wests Tigers.

84 Points conceded by the Warriors in their last three games away from Mt Smart Stadium.

1 Win by Wests Tigers from three games at Campbelltown Stadium in 2015.

7 Wins by Tigers prop Aaron Woods from his past nine games at Campbelltown.

UBET TIGERS \$1.65
WARRIORS \$2.25



SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 4PM

Titans v Dragons

Cbus Super Stadium

HISTORY: Played 14, Dragons 10, Titans 4.

THIS GROUND: Played 6, Dragons 4, Titans 2.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Dragons 34 bt Titans 6 at WIN Jubilee Oval, rd 24, 2014.

MAGIC NUMBERS

3 Wins by the Dragons from past four games against the Titans. The Red V also enjoys playing at Cbus Super Stadium, winning three of their last four visits.

6 Losses by St George Illawarra from their past seven away games.

6 Wins by the Dragons from eight daytime games played this season.

6 Tries by Dragons forward Joel Thompson from his past seven games against the Titans.

UBET TITANS \$2.75
DRAGONS \$1.45



MONDAY, AUGUST 31, 7PM

Raiders v Panthers

GIO Stadium

HISTORY: Played 66, Panthers 33, Raiders 32, drawn 1.

THIS GROUND: Played 24, Raiders 16, Panthers 8.
LAST TIME THEY MET: Raiders 34 bt Panthers 24 at Pepper Stadium, rd 20, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

3 Wins by the Panthers from their past five games at GIO Stadium.

5 Tries by Panthers winger David Simmons from his past three games in Canberra.

5 Wins by Panthers coach Ivan Cleary from his past six clashes against teams coached by Ricky Stuart.

2 Wins by the Raiders from seven night-time games this season.

UBET RAIDERS \$1.60
PANTHERS \$2.35



Scan page
after 5.30pm
Tuesday
for all the
Round 25
team lists!

COMING UP

ROUND 26

Thursday, September 3

Broncos v Storm at Suncorp Stadium, 7.45pm

Friday, September 4

Roosters v Rabbitohs at Allianz Stadium, 7.45pm

Saturday, September 5

Panthers v Knights at Pepper Stadium, 3pm

Dragons v Tigers at ANZ Stadium, 5.30pm

Cowboys v Titans at 1300Smiles Stadium, 7.30pm

Sunday, September 6

Eels v Raiders at Pirtek Stadium, 2pm

Sharks v Sea Eagles at Remondis Stadium, 4pm

Bulldogs v Warriors at ANZ Stadium, 6.30pm

FINALS WEEK ONE

September 11-13

Qualifying semi-finals:

Team 1 v Team 4

Team 2 v Team 3

Team 5 v Team 8

Team 6 v Team 7

FINALS WEEK TWO

September 18-19

Semi-finals

FINALS WEEK THREE

September 25-26

Preliminary finals

FINALS WEEK FOUR

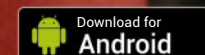
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BRAINBUSTERS

Fancy yourself as a footy trivia know-it-all? Then test yourself with these tricky rugby league puzzles

QUIZ

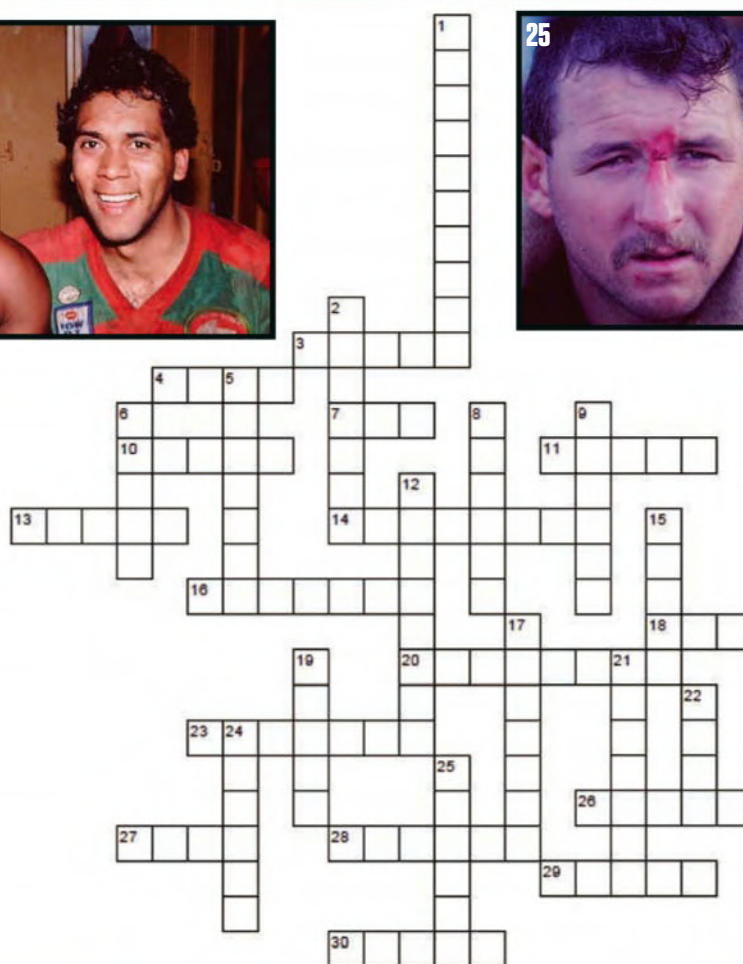
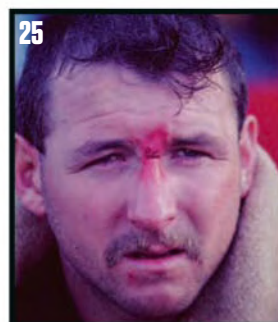
1. In what year did Mick Cronin make his Test debut?
2. Who is the last player to represent Australia while playing for a NSW country club?
3. Name the Gold Coast winger who scored four tries in his first-grade debut in 2008?
4. Against which club did Andrew Johns play his last first-grade game?
5. Which Super League club did Sam Burgess play for before joining South Sydney?
6. In which Sydney suburb would you find Western Suburbs' former home ground, Pratten Park?
7. Which former Test forward set the record for most tries in a game? Give yourself an extra point if you know how many times he touched down. (Hint: he set the record in 1920)
8. Which premiership club did Marcus Bai make his first grade debut for?
9. In which year did Cameron Smith make his Origin debut?
10. Which Queensland forward was named Australia's vice-captain for the 1989 tour of New Zealand.

ANSWERS: 1. 1973, Steve Morris, Depto. 3. Jordan Atkins. 4. Canberra. 5. Bradford. 6. Ashfield. 7. Frank Burge, eight. 8. Gold Coast Chargers. 9. 2003. 10. Paul Vautin.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

3. Former Sea Eagles prop, who was dumped from the NSW State of Origin team in 1988 for visiting his pregnant wife while in camp. (5)
4. Knights utility back, debuted against the Dragons at Kogarah this year. (4)
7. Balmain and North Sydney faced off in a play-off for fifth in 198_. (3)
10. Former Canberra trainer. Coached South Sydney in 2005-06. (6)
11. Danny Buderus hails from this NSW town. (5)
13. Former Western Suburbs and Western Reds lock. Played 16 Tests for the Kiwis, Brendon _____. (6)
14. Group 9 club, who are nicknamed the Tigers. (8)
16. Centre, who won a premiership with Newcastle as an 18-year-old in 1997. (7)
18. Surname of Kiwi brothers Tony and Kevin. (3)
20. Michael O'Connor and Paul Vautin played for this club in the 1989 Challenge Cup final. (2,5)
23. Tigers utility. Will join Manly in 2016. (7)
26. First man to captain Australia to a World Cup victory, Dick _____. (5)
27. Nickname of former Test forward Jim Morgan. (4)
28. Former Balmain Test half. Coached Manly in 1955-56, Pat _____. (6)
29. Captained Canberra in the 1987 grand final. (5)
30. **Photoclue:** Played 51 first-grade games for Souths in the 1980s. Les ____.



DOWN

1. Ron Willey made his first-grade playing debut for this club in 1948. (10)
2. South Korean electronics giant, had two stints as the Roosters' major sponsor. (7)
5. South Sydney five-eighth Alf Blair was widely known by this nickname. (7)
6. Parramatta coach, 1997-2006. (5)
8. Former Storm and Titans back. Currently with the ACT Brumbies, Joe _____. (6)
9. Long-serving Raiders prop. Retired in 2007 after two seasons with the Knights. (6)
12. Coached the 2009 NRL runners-up. (8)
15. British back-rower. Had a successful four-season stint with the Wests Tigers from 2009-12. (5)
17. London stadium where the Challenge Cup final is traditionally played. (7)
19. Goalkicking Manly fullback from the '60s, Bob _____. (5)
21. Jack Gibson coached this club for one season in 1973. (7)
22. Former Test prop. Played 177 games for Manly between 1947-59, Roy _____. (4)
24. Winner of the 2008 Dally M Medal. (6)
25. **Photoclue:** Penrith's fullback in the 1990 grand final, David _____. (6)

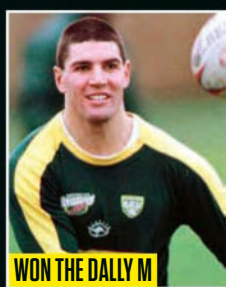
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THE CLUES

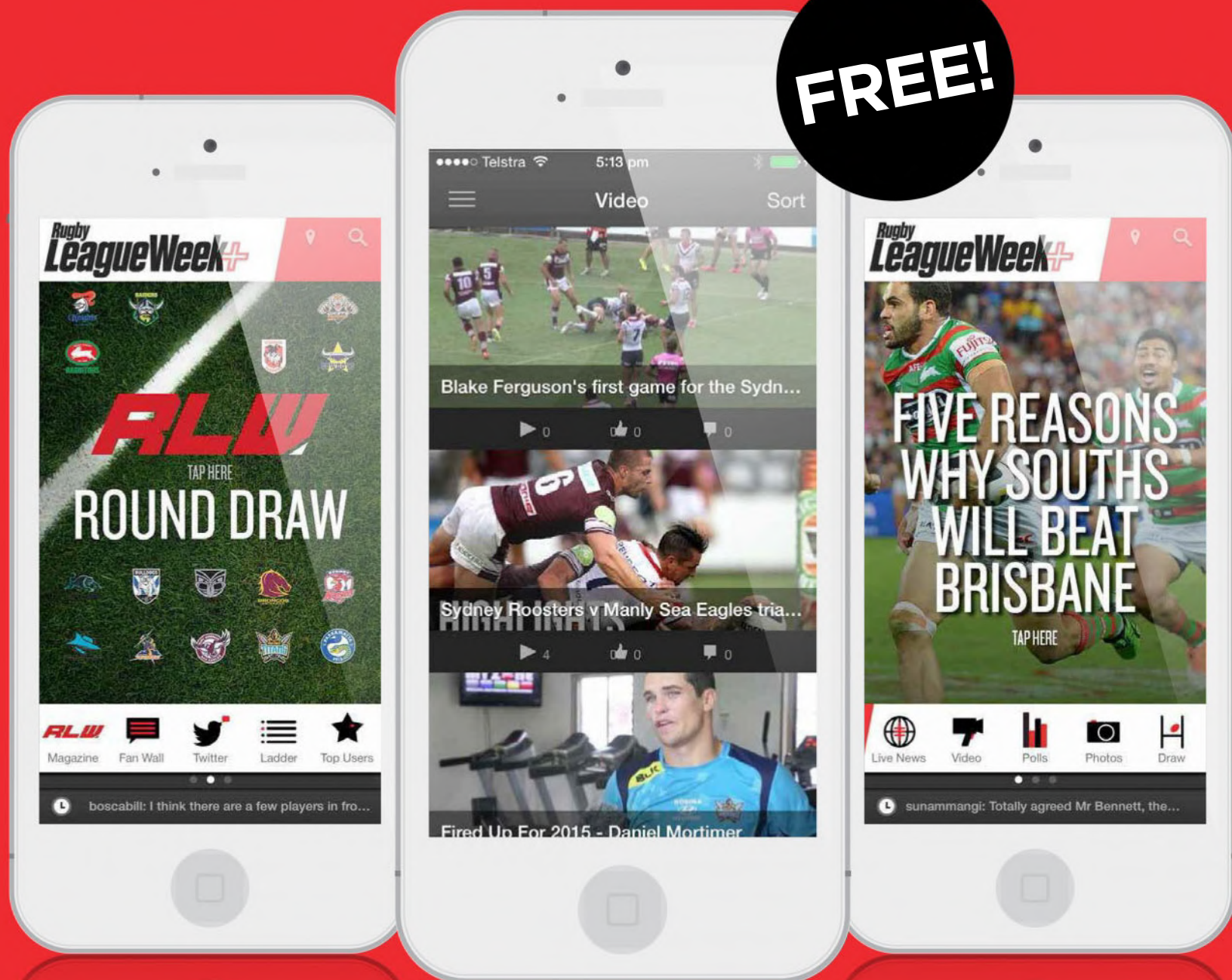


CROSSWORD ANSWERS: ACROSS 3. Smucker. 5. Samsung. 7. Six. 8. Smith. 10. McRae. 11. Tomane. 12. Tare. 13. Tjura. 14. Gunda. 16. Craigie. 18. Iro. 20. St Helens. 23. Moltzen. 26. Poole. 27. Pogo. 28. Devery. 29. Lance. 30. Biles. **DOWN** 1. Canterbury. 2. Samsung. 5. Smucker. 6. Smith. 7. Six. 8. Smith. 10. McRae. 11. Tomane. 12. Tare. 13. Tjura. 14. Gunda. 16. Craigie. 18. Iro. 20. St Helens. 23. Moltzen. 26. Poole. 27. Pogo. 28. Devery. 29. Lance. 30. Biles.



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A SHARK'S TALE

BORN

April 26, 1940, in London, England.

CLUB FOOTY

St Helens 1960-71, 373 games, 57 tries; Cronulla 1971-73, 38 games, 9 tries.

REP FOOTY

Great Britain 1963-1971, 30 Tests/World Cup matches, 5 tries; 20 tour matches, 2 tries; Illawarra 1974 v Great Britain; The Rest 1974 v Kangaroos.

GRAND TOTAL

463 games, 73 tries.

- Played junior footy with Dudley Kingswinford rugby union club.
- Was a member of St Helens' Challenge Cup-winning teams in 1961 and '66.
- Made his Australian premiership debut for Cronulla v Newtown at Endeavour Field in rd 15, 1971.
- Played in the losing Cronulla side in the 1973 grand final against Manly.
- Captain-coached Wollongong in the Illawarra comp in 1974.

(League Information Services)



The English enforcer was one of the most-feared hardmen in an era when only the toughest survived BY STEVEN RUSSO

'When I was three years old my dad accidentally sawed my finger off ... every time I knocked on in a game I blamed it on him'

You were forced out of your home at a really young age, weren't you?

I was a mistake in the family. I was one of five but my closest sibling was about 13-and-a-half years older. I was born in Stepney in London's East End but our home was flattened during the blitz (in WWII) when I was about nine months old. My dad came from a place called Dudley in the West Midlands, so we moved there.

Losing your home wasn't the only misfortune you suffered during your childhood either ...

When I was three my dad accidentally sawed my finger off. He was cutting fire wood and the saw slipped. Every time I knocked on I blamed it on my dad!

Is it true your rugby league career began at St Helens because of a newspaper ad?

In 1960 I was working as an apprentice toolmaker. I had broken my arm playing seven-a-side rugby union and I was just doing odd jobs in the factory while it recovered. One of the blokes I worked with was a mad punter and he came over with a newspaper saying, 'Cliffy, have a go at this! They pay you for playing, why don't you have a look?' I went for a trial with St Helens after I got my arm out of the plaster. The trial was bloody hard! Our rugby club's first-grade side played most of the top teams' third-grade sides, and I clearly wasn't as fit as I thought I was. St Helens obviously liked what I did, though, and signed me up. My contract was £1500 and £750 of that was up front and it was for life. Back then the average wage in Northern England was about £10 to £12 a week, and I was getting £10 a week labouring and £25 a win, less tax. It was great money, we could afford fish and chips two times a week rather than once! (laughs)

You won a Challenge Cup against Wigan after just 11 games – what propelled you to the big stage so quickly?

I was only there for my tackling because my handling wasn't too good (laughs). A bloke called Freddy Leyland and I were fighting it out for the position of blindside front-rower, and I reckon I was picked on the back of our semi-final win

over Hull FC. They didn't keep stats back then, but I must have made about 600 tackles in that game! Back then, winning the Cup at Wembley was considered the ultimate achievement in England – international football was secondary. It didn't mean a thing to me, though. There were 95,000 people waving scarves and singing, but the significance of the occasion didn't hit me until after the game. If it had hit me beforehand, I probably would have played like a bag of crap. I had a decent game; I managed to stop Billy Boston from scoring a try by tackling him into the corner.

Your first Test was the infamous Swinton Massacre. What are your memories of that game?

It was a tough game but we were up against it from the start. Don't get me wrong, Australia was a great side, but everyone forgets we had only 11 men on the field for about 60-70 minutes. I'm not saying we would have won the game with a full side but the score definitely wouldn't have been that lopsided. We were actually leading early and I thought, 'This is easy', but then Eric Ashton got carried off and Frankie Myler not long after that. Our two second-rowers had to line up on the wing, and we only had four in the pack up against a team with Gasnier, Raper and (Noel) Kelly! It was unbearable chasing those blokes all afternoon. Incidentally, I was one of only two players to retain my place for the third Test at Leeds.

What's your most memorable blue?

Definitely my stoush with Jimmy Morgan in 1970. In the first Test of that Lions tour we had a head-butting competition. He tried to head-butt me first but missed, so I thought, 'Here we go, you're going to get one'. The press wanted to get a hold of it and suggested I be banned from playing because of my viciousness, but Jimmy came out and said, 'Well, I tried to head-butt him first and didn't do it properly; he obviously knew what he was doing'. I admired him for that and we actually became very good friends. We used to do a lot of trips together before he passed away (in 2005).

You were part of the last British touring team to claim the Ashes back in 1970. How did you turn it around after losing that first Test 37-15?

Years ago there used to be a group of players called 'Ham and Eggers'. They were the guys who protected the Test players by playing all the tour games. During the 1966 tour, the Test side would train separately from the Ham and Eggers, who were left to do their own thing. But in 1970 our coach, John Whiteley, was having none of that. He said, 'All 26 people deserve to be here. We're all internationals and we're going to do everything together'. There was no splitting into Test and Ham and Egger squads, we all trained together. Australia got the bounce of the ball in the First Test but from that point on everything just clicked.

Is it true that you almost ended up playing professional gridiron?

Yeah. During the 60s this Canadian mob came to England scouting league and union players when the US put a freeze on players going over to Canada. They wanted kickers and heard about our goalkicking winger Len Killeen at St Helens. They came to training one evening and asked Lenny to kick one of their footballs from the 50-metre line. They then asked Lenny whether there'd be anyone interested in coming along with him. Lenny told them I loved tackling, so they all came around to my place. I told them I wanted a £15,000 deposit in an English bank before I even left. The bloke didn't even blink and said he'd fly us over at the end of the season. We shook on it, but the next thing you know, Lenny gets a letter saying the club had gone bankrupt because our mate had signed basically everybody he spoke to!

How did your move to Cronulla come about?

I was initially going to join Canterbury. They managed to send a contract over to me despite the postal people in Britain being on strike. A pilot took it over to Leeds and it was eventually delivered to me in St Helens. Tommy Bishop must have heard about it because he kept on ringing me asking me why I didn't want

to come to Cronulla. I thought I'd play both parties off against each other and asked Tommy what the Sharkies had to offer. I eventually decided to settle on the Sharks but St Helens got wind of it, and demanded a transfer fee of £24,000. I said, 'You're joking, I've been here 10 years and I'm over 30! I'm not asking for a transfer, I'm asking for a release'. They refused, so I just said, 'Bugger it, I'll retire'.

What happened next?

Tommy kept ringing but I'd just say, 'I'm not interested'. The Sharks sent (administrators) Arthur Winn and Bob Abbott over to England. I told them, 'I'm not really interested because no one is going to make that much money out of me, plus I'll lose a bit myself because the fans won't turn up to my testimonial functions'. Anyway I ended up running my own testimonial because St Helens got jack of me. In the end I actually emigrated to Australia – I'm a £10 Pom!

Tell me about the horror diet you had to endure in 1972 ...

We were playing Penrith early in the season and, from memory, I had my jaw broken after copping an elbow in the first half. My wife was planning to make me a T-bone that night. I remember calling her to say, 'Don't bother, my jaw's all wired up!' I missed about six weeks and had to wear a brace in my mouth with little hooks in it. I was living on tomato soup and runny Weet-Bix. It was a good way to lose weight!

You were one of the main brawlers in the '73 grand final. Was the stink planned?

There was no plan to be violent. We were just going to take it up the middle, suck them up and then spin it wide. There were a few suspect tackles early from both sides and it just erupted. Freddy Jones said it was him who smacked Tommy in the mouth first. I didn't see that, though. I think the main reason there was a lot of squawking about our supposed nasty tactics was because Malcolm Reilly caught the other end of Ronny Turner and had to come off early. That was a payback because Malcolm put about 24 stitches in Ronny's mouth with an elbow down at Endeavour Field earlier that year. 

YOUR SHOUT

Send to: rlw@bauer-media.com.au
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MAKE SCRUMS A CONTEST AGAIN — PLEASE!

I TOTALLY AGREE WITH GEOFF

Prenter's comment about modern
scrums in the August 3 issue of *RLW*.

Sure, nobody wants a return to the
old rules where 30 scrum penalties a
match were common.

But they need to be a contest
again.

Wins against the feed can make the
footy exciting again.

My solution would be simple, but
workable. Halfbacks must feed the
ball in straight, with only the two
hookers allowed to strike for the ball.
Whichever halfback ends up with the
ball, it's play on!

It brings unpredictability back
to the game — and would still keep
scrum penalties to a minimum.

It's worth a go, surely.

The play-the-ball is another blot on
the modern game. Players *must* be
penalised for not playing the ball with
their foot.

Steve Balkin, Maryborough, Qld



Whitney McGovern was thrilled to meet rising
Sea Eagles hitman Jake Trbojevic.



Nathan Hassett sent in this photo of his younger
brother, Andrew, with Knights flyer Nathan Ross
after his NRL debut in round 21. The Knights star
went to the same school as Andrew, so he was
especially excited to meet him and get a photo.



Proud dad Dean Waddell
sent in this shot of his kids
Paris and Jack showing their
support for the Warriors.

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Cullen Devene, 11, Hardy Devene, 8,
and Latryse Tavita, 11, got to meet
Eels legend Nathan Hindmarsh
and they reckon that's gold! They met
Hindy at a coaching clinic at Curtin
University in Perth last month.

Rugby
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